The Land of the Black Mountain eBook

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INTRODUCTION

“What a terrible country!” said a lady tourist to me once in Cetinje, “nothing but barren grey rocks; and what poverty! I declare I shan’t breathe freely till I am out of it again.”

This is a common opinion of travellers to Montenegro, and one that is spread by them all over Europe. And yet how unjust! A fairly large number of tourists take the drive from beautiful little Cattaro up that wild mountain-side and through the barren Katunska to Cetinje. A few hours later they return the way they came, convinced that they have seen Montenegro. A few, very few, prolong the tour to Podgorica and Niksic, returning with a still firmer conviction that they have penetrated into the very fastnesses of that wonderful little land. These chosen few have at least seen that all is not bare and rocky, that there are rich green valleys, rushing mountain torrents, and pleasant streams.

If they are very observant they will likewise notice that the men of these parts are more wildly clad and fiercer-looking than their more polished brethren of the “residence.” Rifles are carried more universally the nearer lies Albania, and in Podgorica itself they will have seen—particularly if chance has brought them there on a market-day—crowds of savage-looking hill-men, clad in the white serge costume of Albania, standing over their handful of field produce with loaded rifles; stern men from the borders with seamed faces; sturdy plains-men tanned to a mahogany tint by the almost tropical sun of the valleys; shepherds in great sheepskins, be it ever so hot; and haughty Turks, hodjas, and veiled women, all in a crowded confusion, haggling and bartering. Quaint wooden carts drawn by patient oxen, their huge clumsy wheels creaking horribly; gypsies with thunderous voices acting as town criers; madmen shrieking horribly; blind troubadours droning out songs of heroes on their guslars. If the tourist has witnessed and understood all this, then he has seen something of Montenegro. But beyond those lofty mountains which rise on either side of the carriage road, live these same people in their rude villages. There are towns far away, unconnected by any road, to reach which the traveller must journey wearily by horse and on foot, over boulder-strewn paths, by the side of roaring torrents, through the cool depths of primeval forests, and over the snow-clad spurs of rugged mountains. There he will find men accustomed to face death at any moment, who delight in giving hospitality, and who talk of other lands as “the world outside.” These are the Montenegrins to whom we owe some of the most pleasant reminiscences of our lives.

Our book does not describe the whole country, as unfortunately we were unable to visit the northern districts and the lofty Durmitor, but we certainly saw the more interesting half, namely, the whole of the Albanian frontier.

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Amongst those hardy borderers we made many warm friends, but it would be invidious to mention names amongst so many. We came to the country with a single introduction, to Dr. Stefanelli, the companion of many of our journeys, and we left at the conclusion of six months with a host of friends. Still to two we wish humbly to express our gratitude for many acts of, at the time, unknown courtesy, namely, H.R.H. Prince Nicolas, and the Metropolitan of Montenegro, Mitrofanban. As a slight token of our thanks to, and admiration of, that true father of his people, Prince Nicolas, we respectfully dedicate this book to the soldier-poet and prince of the Land of the Black Mountain.

Since we finished the story of our travels, I have had the honour of speaking long with Prince Nicolas and of seeing him on many occasions; for during our first travels in the land we were always strangely unlucky in this respect. I then learnt how our progress through Montenegro had been watched over, and contingencies provided for, which we had taken as a matter of course.

Some, alas! of our friends are now no more. The Governor of Podgorica was shot down in broad daylight a short while ago whilst taking his midday promenade in which we so often shared. Others, too, have fallen on the borders. Friends are easily lost in Montenegro, where a charge of powder and a bullet settle differences.

Disagreeable episodes happened to us—they happen everywhere—but these we have rightly or wrongly omitted. The good that we experienced certainly outweighed the bad, and that shall be our reason for so doing.

And again, throughout the book we have given our *first* impressions, much of it was written during our actual progress through the land. It may be that our feelings will thus be more interesting than a cut-and-dried treatise of the land and its inhabitants.

In conclusion, it will not be amiss to add an explanation of the Serb names which appear throughout the book in the original spelling. The names have often an unpronounceable appearance, and look harsh and forbidding. This is far from the case, for the Serb language is full-toned and musical.

In common with the Slav languages it has a sixth vowel, *viz*. “r”—hence such words as “Srb” (Serb), “trg” (place or square), and “Trst” (Triest). It is only necessary to roll the “r” to overcome this seeming anomaly of a collection of consonants. The language is spoken exactly as it is written, as for instance Italian, but the consonants s, c, and z vary according to their accents.

“s” is our sharp s; but with inverted circumflex

“s” it becomes “ssh,” as in “show.”

“c” is pronounced “tz”: thus Cetinje is spoken Tzetinje; Podgorica as Podgoritza.

“c” and “c” are accentuated “tsch”: as Petrovic, Petrovitsch; Moraca, Moratcha.

“z” is soft, as “s” in “rose.”

“z” is sounded like the French “j” in “journal.”

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“dz” is sounded like the “j” in “James.”

“nj” is sounded like the “gn” in French “campagne”: Tzetigne (Cetinje), and so on.

We are fully aware of many shortcomings, and for these we crave pardon, but if we benefit little Montenegro by the publication of our work, then we shall not have written it in vain.

England has once before proved the friend of Montenegro; the fighting instincts of that brave race, their love of freedom, and the possession of their most glorious of histories appeal to all of us.

I fear there are troublous times ahead for that gallant little nation, perhaps another bitter disappointment is in store for them, when they will need a friend.

Times have changed now, personal valour avails but little against overwhelming armies and modern artillery.

“We little nations must beseech the Almighty to give us peace,” said Prince Nicolas to me not so very long ago.

May it be His will!

R.W.

Vienna, *February, 1903*

THE LAND OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN

CHAPTER I

Montenegro’s geographical position—Character of the people—Their honesty, patriotism, and love of arms—Likeness to the Homeric Greeks—The women—-Montenegrin manners, vices, heroism, lack of privacy, police—Goodness of the Prince—The national costume—Religion—Hatred of Austria—Russia’s friendship.

Roughly Montenegro is diamond-shaped, with its points towards north and south, east and west. To the north-east it is bounded by the Sandjak of Novipazar, held by Turkey and Austria jointly, and dividing it from its parent country, the kingdom of Servia. To the south-east lies Albania, while Austria again borders Montenegro in Bosnia and the Hercegovina in the north-west and in Dalmatia to the south-west. Dalmatia and a narrow strip of the Adria complete the circuit, so Austria practically surrounds Montenegro on three sides.

The land may be said to possess three distinct belts of vegetation, each of an entirely different character. It is divided from north to south by the River Zeta, and the low-lying plains are fertile and rich, and this district also comprises the sea coast. To the west is the Katunska or “Shepherds’ huts,” those barren and rocky mountains of old Montenegro, from which the country derives its name; while to the east lies the Brda, mountains vying with Switzerland in beauty, rich grazing grounds and densely-wooded hills abounding with game, and the streams well stocked with fish.

The plains are the granaries of Montenegro, unfortunately too limited in area to give an abundance, but there is a mine of wealth in the Brda, when that part shall be opened up by connecting roads. The vast primeval forests and mineral products will be an important source of income in the times to come. Even at the present day the district constitutes the chief source of revenue from the export of cattle, sheep, and horses which flourish on the magnificent mountain pasturages. Montenegrin wool, greatly famed, comes too from the Brda.

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It is chiefly in the Katunska, the cradle of the Montenegrin nation, that the most interesting geological formations are to be found, and in these formations lay its former strength. The most prominent features of the Karst region are imperfect valleys which have no outlet. As a consequence of this, the water cannot escape by an overground bed, so it forces itself through the porous surface to reappear in a lower valley, undermining the subsoil, which in time collapses, and forms the oases of this otherwise barren land. The rain washes down the little earth that there is on the hillside, the chemical action of the limestone oxidises the same, and the so-called “terra rossa” is formed in these depressions, sufficient to give nourishment to the trees and bushes which grow there. The frugal peasant cultivates these tiny patches of earth and derives enough crops to subsist on, the goats and cattle living on the bushes and smaller trees.

In olden times the little nation found barely enough substance for themselves, consisting as they did of but a few thousand, but an invading army starved. It was in truth a land “where a small army is beaten, a large one dies of hunger.”

The character of the people has been formed by their surroundings. Hardy and frugal, capable of subsisting on the smallest amount of nourishment, lithe and active, and open and fearless as their native mountains.

Their food consists of a piece of maize bread at daybreak, and they eat nothing again till sunset, when bread and a little milk form their evening meal. Meat is eaten but rarely, and then they feast. The athletic feat of crossing rock-strewn surfaces, bounding from rock to rock at a great pace, rivalling their goats in sure-footedness at dizzy and precipitous heights, has lent their gait that perfect grace of motion which characterises the mountaineer, and in particular the Montenegrin. The danger in which they have perpetually lived, accustomed to look death in the face at any moment, has stamped upon them that open and fearless look which most forcibly strikes the stranger.

Their blood is of the purest and noblest in the Balkans, for they are largely descended from the noble families of the old Servian Empire who fled to the Katunska after the bloody field of Kossovo, which destroyed the might of the Serbs for ever. It is probably from these ancestors that their noble bearing and perfect manners, in even strange and unaccustomed surroundings, are derived. Their notion of honour is of the highest, and thieving and robbery are practically unknown.

Prince Nicolas, like King Alfred, trusts his subjects in this matter of thieving implicitly. Should a man drop a case of banknotes on the road, the law says that the finder shall pick it up and place it on the nearest stone, so that the loser has but to retrace his steps, glancing at the wayside stones. This law is invariably followed.

The Montenegrins are still an armed nation, and the following proverbs illustrate their love of weapons. One says, “A man without arms is a man without freedom”; the other says, “Thou mayest as well take away my brother as my rifle.”

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Their patriotism and unswerving loyalty to the reigning Prince have ever been their most brilliant virtues.

The famous traveller Kohl has likened the Montenegrins to the ancient Greeks of Homeric times, and the comparison holds good to this day.

“Love of freedom and pride of weapons, simplicity of life—remember the love of mutton and wine, as described by Homer—hospitality, the superiority of man over woman, all these features, together with the fact that the heroes are themselves the singers of their deeds,” says Kohl, “are to be found in the Montenegrins, as well as in the Greeks of Homer.”

Woman takes a very inferior position in Montenegro. She is respected in a sense, and her position has improved greatly in recent times, chiefly owing to the example set by the Prince himself. At the official reception held on New Year’s Day, when the humblest peasant can go to Cetinje and kiss the Prince’s hand, Prince Nicolas places his wife to his right, and every man must first kiss her hand. Thus in the highest classes woman takes very nearly the same place as in civilised lands, but as the social scale descends, so does the position of woman.

In the lowest classes she is still not much more than a beast of burden, given to man to ease his lot. She carries heavy burdens to market, while her lord rides; she may not walk at his side, but a few paces to the rear; neither may she sit at table in the presence of strange men. The kiss with which men salute each other is not allowed to her, and she must kiss the hand only of the man. Likewise, she must rise to her feet when men pass by, and in some districts, should she meet a man on the way, she must stop and remain standing meekly at the side of the path; also, she must leave the room backwards. Neither of these last-mentioned customs is universal, but are to be found largely in the Brda.

The men are handsome and often of immense stature. Giants of 6 feet 8 inches are by no means uncommon; in fact, a few such men will be seen in every town. The average height is quite 5 feet 10 or 11 inches, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, with pleasant faces.

The women are often strikingly beautiful, especially when young, but hard work ages them very quickly; in the upper classes, however, middle-aged and elderly women of regal appearance can often be seen. It is the manners of such women and universally of the men which comes as the greatest surprise, when it is remembered that none or very few have ever seen anything of the outside world.

The faults of the nation are inordinate vanity in their appearance, causing them to impoverish themselves for the sake of gorgeous clothes, and gambling. They gamble to an excessive degree, heaping debt after debt upon their heads. Both these vices have

caused an active legislation. Gold embroidery has been abolished on the uniforms of the army officers, and Prince Danilo has already declared that on coming to the throne he will abolish the national costume altogether, *i.e.* amongst the officials and the upper classes.

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They love money and will do a good deal to get it, but when they have money, they spend it in a reckless and freehanded manner. Thus they will overcharge a stranger in an exorbitant fashion, thinking, in their simple minds, that travellers are possessed of unlimited means. Tourists are largely to blame for this, and pay, without audible comment, what is asked. If a strong remonstrance is made, the charge will be reduced in most cases. The dawn of civilisation has brought the love of money, the frugal Montenegrins are now awakening to what money will procure them, and they take as much as they can get without thought, and without swindling intentions. Perhaps the lack of banks or any institute where money can be saved up, may account for this. Merchants buy houses or increase their stock. The peasant, as often as not, gambles it away or buys fine clothes, a few thrifty ones purchasing an extra cow.

No doubt the influence of civilisation, and in particular the long-delayed prosperity of the land which is now slowly raising its head, will alter this.

They very rarely quarrel, never brawl, and are hardly ever to be seen in a state of intoxication.

On the other hand, they are merry, convivial, boon companions, and are never happier than when dancing, singing their war songs and love romances, or listening to the "guslar"—the national troubadour.

The characteristic bravery is still manifested in reckless deeds of "derring do" on the Albanian borders. Shepherds will deliberately drive their flocks across the frontier, thereby courting instant death. Many instances have been given illustrating their love of danger.

Privacy of dwellings is non-existent. Men walk in and out, seating themselves in the room and talking. In the evening the men will congregate, stand and squat in a large ring, and solemnly discuss the events of the day, or in towns will walk majestically up and down the main street swinging the graceful "struka" or shawl from their shoulders. Likewise, the drinking-houses are used as common meeting-places, and there is no need to order refreshment.

Marriages, baptisms, deaths are occasions for great feasting, when the national sheep is killed and roasted whole, and wine and spirits consumed in appalling quantities, without however affecting the heads of these iron people.

To keep order, there is a ridiculously small force of police or gendarmes, and their object is more to preserve the peace in places where different races meet, animated with fanatical hatred of each other. But during the whole time of our sojourn in Montenegro, we never witnessed a single case of men arrested for petty offences, or for breaking the peace by common brawling or drunkenness. The only cases that we did see were connected with the vendetta, which still flourishes. In the course of our travels in the

land we have sufficiently illustrated this lamentable feature that no further comments are necessary.

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Prince Nicolas is said to know the name of every one of his subjects, and will accost him by it. This is doubtless a great exaggeration, and probably means that he knows personally all those who fought under him in the last war, when the nation was considerably smaller than it is now.

No man is too humble but that the Prince will stop and speak to him, and ask him how the world is using him. The man rarely goes empty-handed away. In these latter days the Prince is not so open-handed as formerly, neither does he make so free with his presence, but still it is no difficult thing for any of his subjects to obtain an audience. He will stop a man at haphazard on the road and examine his weapons, and woe betide him if his revolver is carried empty. Every chamber but one must be loaded.

A characteristic instance of the Prince's observancy was once given in Cetinje. An incongruous habit is creeping into the country of carrying a huge cotton umbrella in the great heat. The Prince met a man carrying one open, and promptly broke it over his head, saying—

"Art thou a hero, to carry a woman's sunshade?"

For even to-day the youngest man will maintain that he is a "hero" by right of ancestry, and has no doubt of his capability to act up to the traditions of his country in the event of war.

The national costume is worn by all, and in the richer classes is very gorgeous. The combination of colour is in exquisite taste. There are many variations, but a description of the gala uniform will suffice.

The cap, or "kapa," is the same for Prince and peasant. It is red with a deep black border, which only leaves a small crown of the foundation colour. On this crown in one corner are the letters "H.I." (in Latin characters "N.I." or Nicolas 1st) and five semicircles in gold. The explanations as to the meanings are slightly different. Both say the black border is symbolic of mourning for the losses at Kossovo, while the five lines are explained either as signifying the five centuries which have elapsed since that terrible battle or as symbolic of a rainbow—the sign of hope that one day the glories of the old Serb empire will be restored. The red crown signifies "the field of blood," as the Hebrews have it. Furthermore, the different insignia of rank are worn on the rim of the cap, from the double eagle and lion of the senator in brass, the different combinations of crossed swords of the officer, to the simple star of lead of the corporal.

The costume consists of a "dzamadan," a red waistcoat, embroidered with gold or black silk—the former on gala occasions—over which the "gunj" is worn, a long, white or very pale blue coat, cut so that the breast is left open and free. Another sleeveless jacket is worn, again, over the gunj, called the "jelek," and is a mass of heavy gold and silk embroidery, quite stiff in fact, and a marvel of beautiful tracing and patterns.

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Round the waist are three separate belts, the first a common belt, then the leather "kolan" for the support of the weapons, and over all a silk sash, the "pas," sometimes twenty yards long, wound round and round many times and of brilliant colours.

Below, knee-breeches of dark blue material and voluminous proportions, called "gace," bordered round the pockets with gold-work, and high, patent-leather boots. This latter is merely modern dandyism; the still invariably worn "dokoljenice" are white gaiters, fastened at the back with hooks and eyes, which reach to the "opanki"—shoes made of a flat leather sole, bound over with a thick network of whipcord.

The ordinary costume of the better classes for everyday wear (and this is the uniform of the officers) is a short red jacket, embroidered like the waistcoat in black silk, with sleeves carried either hussar fashion, hanging behind, or over the sleeves of the waistcoat.

Then there are green gunj and even dark blue. The peasant wears usually a coarse white serge gunj for every day and an ordinary shirt.

In the mountain districts and borderlands of the Brda the Albanian costume of tight-fitting white serge trousers, bordered with black braid, is largely worn.

The women wear a somewhat modified array of colour. The girls wear the kapa, without the letters or rainbow; the married women a lace mantilla over their shoulders. The hair is worn, in the case of the married women, in a heavy crown-like plait.

A white, slightly embroidered bodice, silver girdle, and silk skirt, over which is worn a similar open coat to the gunj. And again over this comes the "jecerma," a jacket of red, blue, or violet velvet, according to the age of the woman.

The effect in both men and women is tasteful and picturesque in the extreme.

The struka, or shawl, is greatly worn by men, and the sweeping, swinging effect is most pleasing. It is a shawl of sufficient length that when folded to a narrow width and worn over the shoulders the tassels just touch the ground.

Some of the poorest peasants wear huge sheepskin jackets, even in hot weather.

At the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, which is the religion of the land, is an Archbishop, or "Vladika." Hardly more than half a century ago, the Vladika was Prince and Bishop in one. To-day the Vladika is absolute spiritual head of the Church in Montenegro, and only in matters pertaining to divorce are his rulings reversible by the Prince.

The hatred of the Roman Catholic religion is most marked. The term "Catholic" is an epithet of opprobrium. Hence the hatred of Albania, which on the borders is entirely

Roman Catholic. The hated Catholics also, in the shape of Austria, hem in Montenegro on three sides, and this factor, added to the unfriendly part that Austria played at the Berlin Congress, may account for the growing animosity which is now slowly making itself manifest against

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her in Montenegro. Turkey is no longer feared; in fact, friendly relations are cultivated and steadily increasing; but against Austria very different feelings are held. Austria holds the Bocche de Cattaro, which the Montenegrins took possession of in the Napoleonic wars, commands Antivari, and has edged herself in between the kingdom of Servia and Montenegro in the Sandjak of Novipazar. The inhabitants of the Bocche and a large part of the population of Bosnia and the Hercegovina look to the Prince of Montenegro as their lawful ruler.

It is the oft and open stated dream of Prince Nicolas to see the great Serb-speaking nations re-united, and much as Russia has helped and is fostering this wish, Austria relentlessly checkmates every move in this direction. Austria is even striving to gain influence in Albania through the means of the Roman Catholic priests, who are said to be largely in her pay.

Thus Austria, surrounding Montenegro as she does at present, and enlisting the sympathies of the Albanians, can command every inlet to that brave little country. A "Schwab," as every German-speaking foreigner is termed, is consequently viewed with no friendly eyes; while the Russian is welcomed openly as a friend.

Russia, however, can never hope to buy the allegiance of the Montenegrins; for while appreciating friendly assistance, the faintest attempt to obtain undue influence of power would be sharply resented.

Montenegro will yield her absolute independence to none.

CHAPTER II

History from first conquest by the Romans, 300 B.C., down to the present Prince—-Fruits of the last campaign—Education—The military system—Legal administration—-Crime—Government—The educated classes.

The district which corresponds most nearly to Montenegro of the present day comes first into notice when the Romans attacked Queen Teuta and drove her back beyond the modern Podgorica in the third century B.C. From this time onwards Roman influence made itself felt strongly in the Praevalitana, an outlying province of Illyria, and the city of Dioclea—whose ruins still exist in the neighbourhood of Podgorica, and which was to play such an important part in the germ state of Crnagora, or the "Land of the Black Mountain"—rose into being. Diocletian, the famous divider of the Roman Empire, was born there, and the city became the capital of the district to which it gave the name. The triumvirs placed the border-line of the Eastern and Western divisions at Skodra, or Scutari, as the Europeans call it. Under the early empire, the land was perpetually

changing from East to West, but when the Western division fell under the weight of barbarian invasions Uin 476 A.D., it was finally incorporated in the East. This was a momentous decision, for the manners and habits of the people still remain tinged with Eastern life, and in the ninth century it secured their adhesion

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to the Eastern Church, which influences their policy to the present time. The principality of Dioclea, or Zeta, as it soon became called, was one of the confederate Serb states formed by Heraclius in 622 A.D., to act as a buffer state against the inroads of the Avars. Each state was ruled by a Zupan or Prince who owed allegiance to the Grand Zupan, the head of the heptarchy. But the confederation was very loose, the rival chieftains fighting amongst one another for the supremacy, for the Serb race has ever been noted for its lack of unity and corresponding love of freedom. The famous Bulgarian Czar Samuel, *circa* 980, who had overrun the rest of the Serb states, and made for himself a great empire, found that he was powerless to conquer the warlike John Vladimir of the Zeta; and again, nearly a century later, in 1050, we find the Zeta Zupa so powerful that their Prince assumes the title of King of Servia, and is confirmed in his right by Gregory VII., the famous Pope Hildebrand. Dissensions then broke out again, and for the next hundred years the land owned the sway of the Greek Empire. The two most celebrated Serb kings—Stefan Nemanja (1143) and Stefan Dusan (1336-1356)—both ascended to the head of the confederation from the principality of the Zeta. The latter raised the Serb kingdom to its zenith, and formed an ephemeral empire which bears many a resemblance to that of Napoleon. Montenegro had all this time been steadily growing, and on the accession of Dusan to Servia, the district of the Zeta fell to the Balsic, who proved themselves to be a strong and competent race of rulers. They increased their territories to such an extent that, at the time of the battle of Kossovo, they could boast to ruling over all the land from Ragusa to the mouth of the Drin, including the present West Montenegro and Southern Hercegovina, with Skodra as the capital. After the overthrow of the great Servian Empire on the field of Kossovo, Montenegro became entirely independent of outside suzerainty, and from the year 1389 to the present day, is the only Balkan state which has successfully defied the invasions of the Turk. The Balsic engaged themselves in several fruitless wars with Venice, by which they lost Skodra, so that, when their line died out and the succession fell to Stefan Crnoievic (the name Crnoievic, Black Prince, is supposed by some to be the origin of the name Crnagora or Black Mountain), a new capital must perforce be built, at the northern end of the lake, called Zabljak. Stefan Crnoievic allied himself with Skenderbeg, the King of Albania, and within twelve years is said to have fought over fifty battles with the Turks who, in their impotent rage, poured army after army into the land, but entirely failed to break the courage of this brave little people. His people gave him the title of Voivoda of the Zeta, but the limits of his principality seem to have been very undefined. The position of his son Ivan was, however, of greater danger, for in 1444 the kingdom

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of Hungary had fallen before the Turk, and they captured Constantinople nine years later; after this Servia, Bosnia, Albania (on the death of Skenderbeg), and Hercegovina were overrun in quick succession. In 1484 Ivan found himself obliged to burn his capital of Zabljak, and retire into the more inaccessible mountain fastnesses of the Katunska, the district round Cetinje. Cetinje itself was chosen by Ivan as his new centre, and though hardly pressed, he inflicted many severe defeats upon the Turks. Arrived in his new capital, he called his braves together, and told them that if they would surrender to the foe, they must find a new Prince, for, as for himself, he preferred death. So this little band of warriors, and they could not have numbered more than eight thousand fighting men, swore to resist this almighty foe to death—not to attack, but to resist. It must have been an impressive scene, this compact between Prince and people, and later history bears out fully how nobly the descendants of these mountain warriors have kept to their oath. For they, alone, of all the Balkan states, have successfully repulsed the Turk, who, though often seemingly victorious, has returned home with shattered armies and full of impotent rage.

[Illustration: *Sketch map of Montenegro*.]

In their need they applied to Venice for help, quoting the great assistance that they were rendering her in occupying the Turks; but the Queen of Cities, who was at that moment occupied in patching up a treaty with the Sultan, turned a deaf ear to their entreaties. Montenegro found then, for the first time—and all through her history she was destined to find the same—that she must fight her battles alone. Allies have used her always for their own ends and then shamefully deserted her. Yet all through the spirit of indomitable courage has never deserted the children of Crnagora, for they could never forget the oath which their forefathers had sworn for them.

Ivan, after several great victories, was left to end his days in peace. He spent his years well in strengthening the land, both in the arts of war and peace. In Obod, which is close to Rijeka, he erected a printing press, some twenty years after Caxton had set up his in Westminster, and though it was afterwards burnt by the Turks, still the remembrance of it remains right glorious in Montenegrin memory.

The last Crnoievic relinquished his home for Venice. He had married a Venetian wife, who, among the bleak mountains of the Katunska, was pining for the sun and warmth of her native city. But before leaving he laid down the lines for a powerful regime. A Prince-Bishop, or Vladika, was placed at the head of affairs, but, to help him in his difficult task, there was created a second office, that of Civil Governor, who was to hold a subordinate position. This office was abolished in 1832 by Peter II., on the treachery of the Civil Governor Radonic, who was found to have intrigued with the Austrians.

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From 1616 to 1696 the Vladikas were elective, and under their quarrelsome rule Cetinje was twice burnt and phoenix-like rose again from its ashes. The Turkish armies, though partially victorious, usually met with disaster and ruin before reaching their own territory again; and we read of one notable occasion when Soliman Pasha, with an army of 80,000 men, had sacked Cetinje. On his way home he was surprised by the two tribes of Kuc and Klementi, and annihilated. But as time went on it became necessary from political reasons to change the system of government from election to heredity, and the choice fell on the Lord of Njegusi Danilo Petrovic, whose reign (1696-1735) is chiefly memorable for the Montenegrin vespers of the Turks and Turkish renegades, who had rendered so much assistance to Kiuprili Pasha in one of his terrible invasions. But a crushing defeat of the Turks in 1706 gave the land peace for thirty years.

In 1767 an adventurer named Stefan Mali sprang himself upon the land. He claimed to be the murdered Peter III. of Russia, and easily imposed himself upon the gullible Montenegrin. But he had the interests of Montenegro sincerely at heart, and proved an excellent ruler. His imposture was exposed by Catherine II., but owing to the weakness of the Petrovic heir, the people determined to keep him as their ruler. He fell a victim to the assassin's knife at the instigation of the Pasha of Scutari. His successor, Peter Petrovic, the famous St. Peter of Montenegrin history, was a firm and courageous ruler, who made his influence felt throughout the courts of Europe. Austria, Russia, and England did not scruple to avail themselves of his help and then, as seems to be the Montenegrin fate, left him in the lurch. He defied the armies of the great Napoleon, who came to fear him and his warlike clan insomuch that he was even offered terms of friendship. But the proud mountaineer would have none of it. He now turned his hand, under the influence of Russia, which was then very real, to the consolidation of the land, and slept in peace with his fathers.

His successor, Peter II., carried on the struggle with the Turks, who proposed an increase of territory and a Turkish title in return for the acknowledgment of suzerainty. "As long as my people defend me," was the proud answer, "I need no Turkish title to my throne; if they desert me, such a title would avail me little." War was the effect of this retort, but the Turks gained nothing by it, and peace was soon made.

The danger of the power of Austria came now to be fully recognised. After the Napoleonic wars, Austria had retained Cattaro and Spizza, and trouble now broke out over some land near Budua. The Montenegrins fell upon the Austrians, and fierce conflicts ensued, but Peter, who had gained an extraordinary hold over his subjects, forbade them to continue. Hostilities, however, continued in a desultory fashion for some time.

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Peter was followed by Danilo II., a weak ruler, but his reign is famous for two events—-the cession of the spiritual authority of the Prince-Bishop to an Archbishop and the "Great Charter" of Montenegro. Danilo's reforms, however, led the Turk again to attack his invincible foe, only again to end in great disaster. But in the Crimean War Montenegro, greatly to the disgust of the people, did not participate, and in the Congress which followed Danilo was offered a Turkish title and the hated Turkish protectorate. His willingness to accept this led to the formation of a strong opposition party who demanded war. Fortune was on their side, and the Turks invaded Montenegro. The command fell to Mirko, who from his former exploits had gained the name of the "Sword of Montenegro." A battle was fought at Grahovo, which will ever live in memory as the Montenegrin Marathon. The Turks were completely crushed by a small force of Montenegrins, and peace followed. His brief reign was brought to a close at Cattaro, in 1861, by an assassin's bullet, and Nicolas, his nephew, reigned in his stead.

War broke out again on the Hercegovinian insurrection of the following year, the results of which were disastrous in a high degree to Montenegro. Even the famous Mirko, the father of Prince Nicolas, after sixty battles, could do no more, and the Convention of Scutari (1862) brought the war to a close. It was settled that Mirko, as the firebrand, must leave the country, and various other clauses appear in the Convention, few of which seem to have been strictly adhered to. It needed another war to settle the Turco-Montenegrin border.

The land now enjoyed the blessings of peace for fourteen years, which included a severe famine and an outbreak of cholera. Help was now, however, forthcoming from all sides in the shape of corn and money. In 1869 it was with great difficulty that the Prince could restrain his warlike subjects from aiding the revolted Krivosejans. The Emperor of Austria fully recognised the harm which Montenegro could have done him, and signalised his thanks by the gift of an Austrian Order. But the Montenegrins could not be restrained at the outbreak of the Hercegovinian revolt, and flocked to the standards of their brothers. The Porte's remonstrances were met with a curt demand for the cession of Hercegovina, and Prince Nicolas published at the same time an offensive and defensive alliance with Servia.

Immediately after this (1876) he declared war. Success followed his arms everywhere. A short armistice was concluded, but nothing further came of it, and the war proceeded. The Prince in person stormed the town of Niksic. Podgorica and its fertile plain fell into the hands of the conquerors, and then in quick succession Antivari and Dulcigno were forced to yield. He was about to commence the siege of Scutari when news came of the armistice between Russia and Turkey. The war had shown that no deteriorating element had sprung up among the

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people; they had fought as their ancestors had fought before them, and covered their name with glory and renown. Montenegro had gained a European reputation from this war, and the Porte, bowing to force of circumstances, finally recognised her independence. For five weary centuries had this struggle continued, and it is owing to the talent of their present ruler that the consummation of their hopes has been brought about. Free they always have been, but an acknowledgment of their freedom has ever been set aside. At last they have attained their object. The Turk no longer regards them as an insubordinate province, and it is more than likely that their former hatred of the Turk will pass away, for they have another enemy, who is pressing at their doors on three sides. The terms of the Berlin Congress granted to Montenegro Zabljak, Spuz, Podgorica, and Antivari. Dulcigno was to be restored to the Turks, and in exchange Gusinje and Plava were to be added to Montenegro. But the Albanian communities refused the lordship of Montenegro, and Dulcigno was granted to the Prince after a great naval demonstration of the Powers in 1880.

The result of this campaign was that Prince Nicolas found his little kingdom increased from an area of 2,580 square kilometres, containing a population of 178,000 inhabitants, to over 9,000 square kilometres and a population of at least 240,000. In the last twenty-five years it has increased to quite another 100,000 inhabitants.

War has never again seriously threatened Montenegro, and Prince Nicolas has been enabled to devote all his energies to the improvement of the land.

There is now no district, however wild and cut off it may be, without its school, attendance at which is purely voluntary. Right well have the people availed themselves of this chance of education, and a sliding scale of school fees permits even the poorest peasant to send his son as well as his more wealthy brother.

The teachers have a seminary at Cetinje, which they must first attend, and a gymnasium on the German and Austrian system can be visited, for those boys who wish to extend their education to an European standard. The same boys usually visit some Russian University, occasionally Vienna or Belgrade, and return to their native land as doctors, engineers, or lawyers, and supply the learned professions.

At Cetinje there is a further High School for Girls, founded by the Empress Marie of Russia in 1869.

As the older men have not enjoyed in their youth the advantages of an education which is now placed within the reach of all, lecturers are sent round the country, and on Sundays, in wild and cut-off districts, a man can be seen lecturing to a group of rough mountaineers who are listening intently. These Government lecturers teach the shepherds how to safeguard their sheep and cattle from disease; the lowland peasants

are initiated into the mysteries of vine-growing (every Montenegrin family must plant a vine and attend to it) and tobacco-planting, and general information is given to all.

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The Army has been thoroughly reorganised, and is now, thanks to the gift of the Czar, armed with the most modern magazine rifle and officered by men who undergo a training in the armies of Russia, Italy, or France.

The army system is of the simplest. The actual standing army consists of one battalion and a force of artillery, but during the year 4,000 men pass through its ranks and receive a most efficient training. The men return to their homes at the end of four months' training, but drill weekly continues, on Sundays, till the age limit of sixty is reached, when their arms have to be returned to the Government, who again serve them out to the next recruit. Thus the recruit comes equipped for his four months' training, and takes his arms home with him at the conclusion, and is responsible for their good condition. Each man receives a certain number of cartridges, for which he must always be able to account, so that every able-bodied man is an efficient and well-armed soldier capable of taking the field at any moment.

The smartest men become non-commissioned officers, and carry the insignia of their rank on their caps back to private life, where they become again the instructors of the local militia companies. There are two classes of commissioned officers—the officer of the standing army, trained in a Continental army, and who wears a distinctive uniform, and at least one of these is detailed for service in all the militia centres; and the militia officer, who receives his training with the standing battalion or batteries.

Thus at a preconcerted signal, by trumpet and bonfires at night, and in some districts by a salvo of rifles, the whole Montenegrin Army can be mobilised at any given spot within the time that the furthest detachment can travel to the place of rendezvous. An example of the rapidity and ease of this mobilisation was once given to the late Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria, at Cetinje, when an army, drawn from every part of the country, equipped and ready for the field, was assembled within thirty-six hours of the first alarm. There is no commissariat, for each soldier supplies his own food, or rather his wife will keep him supplied in a lengthy campaign; no cavalry, for they are useless; and no heavy artillery.

Law is administered by district courts for the more serious cases, with a Supreme Court of Appeal at Cetinje. There are no lawyers or costs; each man brings his own case and witnesses in civil matters, and criminals are dealt with summarily—that is to say, his district captain sends him in chains to Podgorica, where he receives his final sentence. The smaller district captains and "kmets," or mayors, have a limited amount of jurisdiction, and can inflict punishments, either in fines or short terms of imprisonment. They also settle all minor cases of dispute.

The central, and soon to be the only, prison is at Podgorica. The majority of prisoners are undergoing different sentences, with and without chains, for murders in connection with the vendetta, according to the circumstances. A man who defends his honour, who kills his slanderer, is very lightly punished.

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Against only one class of offender does Prince Nicolas exercise his autocratic powers, *i.e.* the political offender, with whom he is relentless. Such men are thrown into prison, interred in dark cells without trial, and can languish till death sets them free. In this respect the Prince is harsh, and according to Western ideas barbaric, though local circumstances fully excuse his seeming cruelty. The smallness of the prison at Podgorica shows more forcibly than anything else the remarkable lack of crime in the land. At present (1902) dangerous lunatics are confined in the common prison, but an asylum is rapidly nearing completion.

The government is autocratic. A senate, composed of the different ministers, exists in Cetinje, but all powers are jealously held by the Prince. He appoints the ministers and all the higher officials of the land, and only recently have the people been granted the right to elect the kmets.

Montenegrin engineers now build the roads in place of Austrians and Russians, and the difficulties that they meet with and surpass at every turn are sufficient evidence of their capabilities. Foreign doctors and professors are yearly becoming more rare. In fact, Montenegro is rapidly becoming self-supporting and self-educating.

Literature, always in olden times in advance of the surrounding lands, is fostered by the Prince, himself a scholar and a poet of no mean order. Two weekly papers in Cetinje and Niksic have a large circulation.

Under Prince Nicolas' fatherly care the country improves in a wonderful manner from year to year. Roads are planned to connect the whole land, which only lack of funds are hindering from completion, and a railway is projected to connect the towns of Niksic, Podgorica, and Rijeka with Antivari and the sea.

When Prince Nicolas shall be called to his fathers his son, Prince Danilo, will worthily carry on the work so nobly begun by his father, for he is a man imbued with the ideas of Western improvements and civilisation.

CHAPTER III

The journey to Montenegro—Arrival in Cattaro—Beauty of the Bocche, and the drive to the frontier—First impressions of Montenegro—Njegusi—The national troubadours—Arrival in Cetinje.

The simplest way of entering the Land of the Black Mountain is *via* Cattaro in Dalmatia. The sea-trip from Trieste, which takes a little over twenty-four hours, is a revelation of beauty, for the Dalmatian coast is sadly unknown to the traveller. The journey can also be made from Fiume, whence the "Ungaro-Croata" send a good and very frequent service of steamers. But the idler should take a slow boat and coast lazily down the

Dalmatian archipelago, visiting all the smaller towns and islands, which the fast line is bound to avoid. It is one of the most beautiful sea-trips in Europe, each little port possessing gems of old Roman and Venetian architecture, unrivalled, perhaps, in the world and set in a perfect framework of lovely country and dancing seascape.

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It was a glorious morning in May when the *Graf Wurmbrand*, the Austrian-Lloyd's fast steamer, left Trieste, bearing us to Cattaro. The Gulf of Trieste is very beautiful, for the green hills, all dotted with villas, the busy harbour life, the Julian Alps rising up majestically far away on the starboard, and directly behind the town, gaunt and grey, the naked Karst, of which we were to see so much in Montenegro; all made a picture that it would be difficult to forget.

At midday we arrived at Pola. The entrance to the harbour is well covered by islands, and on each of these frowns a great fort, some of which, however, are so carefully hidden that their locality is only betrayed by a flagstaff. A narrow channel leads to the inner harbour, Austria's naval dockyard and arsenal. Here are the warships and building yards, and away to the left, as a strange and unfitting contrast, the Arena, one of the best-preserved specimens of Roman work, rises seemingly from amongst the houses. Pola is full of Roman remains. All is so green and peaceful, in spite of the countless fortifications which render the harbour well-nigh, if not quite, impregnable, that Nature and War seem for once to go hand-in-hand.

[Illustration: THE GRAF WURMBRAND IN THE BOCCHE DI CATTARO]

At twilight Zara looms up into view, and another short stay is made. The town turns out *en masse* for the coming of the *Wurmbrand* or the *Pannonia*—the fast boats from Trieste or Fiume are the events of the week. There is no railway here. Unluckily Dalmatia's finest scenery is passed in the night. Trau, with its splendid loggias and churches; Spalato, with the grandeur of Diocletian's palace, are denied to the traveller; Lesina, proudly calling itself the Nice of Austria; Curzola, whose mighty Venetian bastions stand out into the sea, and many another delightful little town and island, only show a twinkling light or two in the darkness as the steamer ploughs by. At daybreak we are nearing Gravosa, Ragusa's modern port. As we leave again, and round the peninsula of Lapad, glorious in a mass of semi-tropical vegetation, Ragusa bursts upon our view. Seen on a sunny morning it is a sight for the gods. Built well into the sea on inaccessible cliffs, surrounded by lofty walls, with a great hill as a background, it has well been called the prettiest bit of Dalmatia. It possesses a magnificent winter climate and a good hotel, so that people are forsaking the Riviera for this comparatively unknown paradise.

Far too soon Ragusa fades away, and now the approaching mountains grow higher and wilder. Those lofty peaks, towering above the others, black and forbidding, are Nature's bulwarks of the land which we are visiting. It is from a distance that the name "Black Mountain" seems so aptly given to this fierce little state, though some historians wish to explain the derivation otherwise.

The Bocche (or mouths) di Cattaro, three in number, are a consummate blending of the Norwegian fjords and the Swiss lakes, and so lofty and steep are the surrounding mountains that the sun can only reach the bottom for a few hours at midday.

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Away at the end of one fjord lies the village of Risano, an idyllic spot, whence a road is in the course of construction to Niksic. All the worthy Bocchese are absolutely Montenegrin in sympathy, and Austria has had much trouble with these equally warlike Serbs.

A curious conical hill rises out of the town, a high wall zigzags up to the fort above, showing Cattaro's strength of former days. Now, a few insignificant mounds of earth far away on the mountain-tops are all that is to be seen of the military might of modern Cattaro. Yet how powerful are those forts only the Austrian authorities know. Cattaro and the Bocche are impregnable from sea or land, though this array of strength against land attack seems almost unnecessary, as Montenegro possesses no heavy cannon at all. However, Austria is not reckoning in this case with Montenegro alone. But these are political questions.

We were fortunate in securing a carriage of the Montenegrin post, which has good drivers, and what is still better, a fixed tariff, over which there can be no dispute. The drivers of Cattaro ask, and often get, twice the legal fare from ignorant strangers.

Cattaro affords no comforts to the traveller; more is the pity, as it is one of the most magnificent spots in the world. The town itself is tiny and a perfect maze of little Venetian streets, in which it is easy to lose oneself if it were only larger. To walk upon the Riva and gaze upon those precipitous mountains which tower above the town and its militarily guarded walls is a sight which at first is hardly to be comprehended. It is too stupendous. Such a masterpiece of Nature can never tire.

Montenegrins crowd the streets, and the little market is full of peasants who have wearily staggered down those steep paths in the early dawn with their enormous loads of field produce. Stately men wearing the insignia of their rank on their little caps pace up and down majestically and contrast strangely with the dapper Austrian officers. Their belts yawn suggestively, something is missing to complete the attire. It is the revolver, which Austrian law compels them to leave behind on entering her land. They are obviously ill at ease without that familiar weapon, for ever and anon a hand strays unconsciously to the empty belt seeking its wonted resting-place on the butt.

Strolling one night on the Riva, we involuntarily held our breath as we came in sight of the huge lake, for it is easy to forget that this is the Adria. The waters lay unruffled before us, not a ripple disturbed those glassy depths which reflected every tree and cottage on the opposite bank. Each star found its double twinkling in that placid mirror, and mountain frowned back on mountain. It was almost unreal, so marvellous was the reflection. Behind us, at the top of the great ridge, a silvery effulgence proclaimed the coming of the moon. Her brilliant light silhouetted the grim and rocky ridge in startling clearness, though

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it was four thousand feet above us. Through a gap rises a peak, round which a filmy cloud had lovingly wrapped itself like a lace shawl upon the snowy shoulders of a beautiful woman. We took a turn down the quay, and at the end we turned our back on this witching view. Hardly had we retraced our steps a few yards when we and all our surroundings were bathed in a glorious white light. We turned again, and were almost forced to shield our eyes as we gazed on the gentle orb which had now surmounted the intervening ridge. The whole fjord was now transformed into a sea of silver almost as bright as midday. Each nestling village was distinct, even to the tiniest window; each tree and shrub on the wall-like mountain, and even the grim forts, were softened in that sweet radiance. The little paths which zigzag up the hills to the forts above look like great white snakes turning and twisting up those rugged cliffs.

At four o'clock on the following morning we made a start, and were well up the mountain by the time that the sun began to make his presence felt.

[Illustration: THE BOCCHE DI CATTARO]

The high road to Cetinje was built by the Austrians, and it is a marvel of engineering skill, particularly the ascent of the almost perpendicular wall of mountain rising abruptly from Cattaro. In series of serpentines and gradients, which often permit the horses to trot, the road winds up and up, every turn giving a still finer view of the lake below. Cattaro remains in view practically the whole ascent. The view from the top is magnificent and unsurpassed in Europe. The grand bays look like miniature glass ponds, fringed with white toy villages, and far away in the distance the deep blue Adria sparkles and glitters in the sunshine.

Montenegro is entered some little distance from the top, but, as only a row of paving stones indicates the spot, it is not till the carriage dashes through a rocky gorge and out into the open Karst beyond that the traveller realises that he has crossed the border. The sudden change is startling, from the blue sea and green valleys to grey masses of limestone rock and barren mountains. It is the Katunska, the original stronghold of the Montenegrins, within which they defied all comers.

At the first house, solidly built of stone, our carriage halted, and the driver entered it, emerging with the revolver which he had to relinquish on entering Austria. It is a formidable weapon specially manufactured in Vienna for Montenegro, a foot and a half long, firing an enormous cartridge. The revolver is always worn, by all classes alike, and carried loaded by order. The upper classes carry a much smaller and handier weapon, but a revolver must be carried by prince and peasant alike.

Njegusi is the first town or village reached, and here an hour's rest is always made. It is interesting, since it was once the temporary capital, and as the home of the Petrovic

family, the reigning dynasty. It lies in a great hollow of fertile ground, and on the southern side the historical Lovcen ascends. On the top the great prince and hero, Peter II., is buried, and his mausoleum brings large numbers of pilgrims yearly.

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As our carriage drew up before the little hostelry, a crowd of boys were standing in front of a house opposite, which is half telegraph office and half school, for economy in buildings is practised in Montenegro. They saluted us smartly in military fashion. The born soldier is noticed at once, even in the small children; many generations of fighting ancestors have bequeathed a smartness and accuracy of movement which can be envied by many a Continental trained conscript.

The traveller meets with little attention either here or in Cetinje. It is not till he gets well off the beaten track that he sees the hospitable and courteous Montenegrin as he really is.

[Illustration: NJEGUSI]

[Illustration: THE GUSLAR]

During our frugal breakfast of raw ham and goat's cheese, our ears were assailed by the singing of the guslar, or Montenegrin troubadour. The guslars, we noticed, are invariably blind, and as no previous musical education seems necessary, it would appear to be a monopoly of those so afflicted. Their singing is execrable according to Western notions, a range of four or five notes in a wailing minor key making up their register, and they accompany themselves on an instrument (the gusla) from which they derive their name. It is hand-made, resembling a cross between a violin and a mandolin. It possesses one string, and is played with a short curved bow. With careful handling, a series of discordant notes of wearying monotony can be produced. The performance is altogether most doleful.

Yet they are the history books, the legend tellers of the country. They fan the fire of patriotism and loyalty by songs of the deeds and accomplishments of their Prince, of dead heroes and past glorious battles, and form another link with the mediaeval world of which the traveller is so strongly reminded at every step in Montenegro.

As we left the village we passed the birthplace of Prince Nicolas I., though the palace appears to have been entirely rebuilt. In nearly every town or village of importance the Prince has a house, varying considerably in size, but of equally unpretentious exterior.

The road still climbs and reaches the maximum height of three thousand five hundred feet. From this altitude it steadily drops into Cetinje, which lies about two thousand feet above the sea-level. The scenery is unvarying, but not without beauty. It is essentially wild, but the light colour of the rocks and the numerous shrubs which find a footing in the crevices minimise the forbidding character of the country. The land is magnificently adapted for guerilla warfare, where every foot can be contested. Little patches of earth, washed down the hillsides, lie in every hollow, and have been utilised by the careful peasant to grow his tiny crops.

After about seven hours' driving, Cetinje appears in sight, at the end of a long valley, and completely surrounded by the characteristic naked and rugged rocks. The road descends by another series of serpentines, and a long straight drive brings us into the town. The valley is about four miles long and three-quarters of a mile broad and absolutely flat.

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The effect is most odd at first sight, a long main street, an open market-place, and a few side streets constituting the capital of an important European principality. The town, on entering it, bears a strong resemblance to a South African township, where, as is the case here, space is no object, and the houses are rarely more than one story high.

We stayed at the Grand Hotel during our first visit. It is the only really good hotel in Montenegro, and in consequence expensive. Here all the tourists stay for a night or so during a hasty visit to the Crnagora, and it is to be avoided by those who wish to see the country.

CHAPTER IV

Cetinje and its sights—Prince Nicolas—The Archbishop—The barracks—The princes—A visit to the prison and its system—Our departure for Podgorica.

There is not much for the tourist to see in Cetinje; a day is quite sufficient to do the sights, such as they are.

Unfortunately for the country, the tourist usually contents himself with a look round the little capital and returns the way he came to Cattaro, only a few prolonging the tour *via* Rijeka to Scutari. Thus a very erroneous impression is gained of Montenegro and its people. Firstly only a small part of the Katunska is seen, which is the most uninteresting district of the whole country; and, secondly, no idea of the sturdy inhabitants can be formed from the handful of more or less well-to-do officials and merchants, all intimately connected with the outside world, round the proximity of Cattaro.

[Illustration: MONTENEGRIN INFANTRY]

[Illustration: THE VLADIKA AT THE MONASTERY OF IVAN BEG]

Cetinje, with its four thousand inhabitants, is simply the residence of the Montenegrin Court, it is not even a trading centre, which the absence of the Turkish element sufficiently proclaims. It is only the question of expense which has hitherto prevented the transference of the capital to another site, *viz*. Nikzic. Cetinje was chosen as the capital some hundreds of years ago—1484, to be pedantically correct—when a defensible position was the most important factor, which even to-day is a point to be reckoned with.

We will first go round “the sights.”

It possesses two historical buildings in the monastery and the Billard, the rest being all of quite modern origin. The monastery is a picturesque pile of grey stone, nestling under a lofty rock, on which is perched the identical round tower, or “kula,” to give it its local name, on which the heads of Turks slain in battle were exhibited on spikes. It was

not so very long ago that the last grim trophies of war graced its battlements. The monastery contains the burying vault of the reigning house, and is the residence of the Vladika or Archbishop of Montenegro. Prince Nicolas can be found any morning worshipping at the tombs of his ancestors by the visitor who is willing to rise at daybreak. Very often he is the only “faithful” present with the officiating priest at an hour when the sun has hardly peeped over the rocky ramparts of the town.

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Prince Nicolas, the lord of this warrior nation, is a man of imposing stature, so broad-shouldered that his height seems far less than it really is, walking with head erect and firm tread and clad in the rich national costume. The stranger involuntarily doffs his cap and receives in return a short military salute, but accompanied by such a piercing glance from a pair of cold grey eyes that he wonders if he is not an intruder in the land. This is, however, far from the case. Under that austere exterior beats a warm heart and an affability of manner to which the lowliest of his peasants will gladly testify. Prince Nicolas likes to see visitors to his land, and many are the little acts of kindness and courtesy that the traveller receives, all unknown, from his hand, for he knows the coming and going of everyone who makes a longer stay than usual.

Sixty years ago Prince and Bishop were united in one person, and though the Bishop or Vladika has to-day no temporal power, yet in spiritual matters he is absolute. A very kindly man is the present Vladika, Mitrofanban. By an odd coincidence his was practically the first house we visited in Montenegro, and with him we drank our last cup of coffee when we left many months later.

The other building is the old palace of the Princes of Montenegro, which won its odd name of Billard or Biljar from the fact that a former Prince was so addicted to the game of billiards that the principal room of the palace was devoted to the game. It is now used for State purposes. The upper floors are occupied by the Government offices, and at one corner is the Supreme Court of Justice and Appeal, whose judgments are only reversible by the Prince himself. Further, the school and printing works are to be found within its quaint old red-brick walls and bastions.

[Illustration: THE PRINCE'S PALACE]

Opposite to this picturesque old building stands the modern and uninteresting one-storied palace of Prince Nicolas. It shows the simplicity of his nature in perhaps a more marked degree than anything else, for little or no privacy from his people is possible. He walks from his house down a short flight of steps into the street. The small courtyard at the back is surrounded by a low wall, the entrances having no gates.

The recently erected palace of the Crown Prince Danilo, which stands on the outskirts of the town, is a somewhat more pretentious building. It has a large garden completely walled in, which is at any rate an apology for privacy and seclusion.

To obtain a comprehensive view of the town, we climbed a small hill immediately above the monastery, on whose summit stands the gilded cupola erected to the memory of Danilo Petrovic, the Lord of Njegusi, founder of the present dynasty. Very pretty the simple little town looks from here, its red roofs giving a pleasing touch of colour to the otherwise severe landscape of grey rock, dazzling white streets, and sparsely vegetated valley.

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One afternoon we visited the barracks, which are quite new, and the quarters of the battalion of the standing army. The barrack rooms are spotlessly clean, and the order and neatness unsurpassed, which, together with the smart drilling and superb physique of the soldiers, would delight the heart of the severest martinet. Everything connected with the military training of the Montenegrins is up to the standard of Continental excellence. All the officers undergo a long course of training, either in Russia, France, or Italy, and right well have they utilised this privilege. No wonder that the warlike Montenegrin drills as well as his Continental brother. The standing army wear uniforms, and at a distance remind one of our own troops, with their tight-fitting, short red jackets and tiny caps.

[Illustration: *Monastery Billard Prince's Palace* GENERAL VIEW OF THE CETINJE]

Other conspicuous buildings are the theatre, where performances are given in the winter in the Serb language and where Prince Nicolas' famous drama, *The Empress of the Balkans*, was first performed; the house of the Austro-Hungarian Minister, which is the best in Cetinje,[1] and the hospital. It is the only hospital in Montenegro, and is used almost solely for serious surgical operations. Here Prince Mirko, the second son of Prince Nicolas, spends much of his time, for his tastes run to bacteriology, and his skill with the microscope is acknowledged. He is also a musician of no mean order, and the march which he composed in honour of the city of Rome, and which was performed there under the leadership of Mascagni, will be in the memory of all. He has none of the tastes of his elder brother, who, true to the traditions of his country, is a mighty hunter, and whose prowess with rifle, gun, and revolver is acclaimed by the people who understand these gifts better.

[Footnote 1: The Russian Minister has now an equally imposing edifice.]

By far the most interesting episode of our sojourn in Cetinje was a visit to the prison, which we were enabled to do with our camera, by the kindness of the Minister of Justice. It was the first time in the annals of Montenegro that strangers had been allowed to take photographs in a prison.

At the appointed hour we approached the plain building, surrounded by no wall of any kind, which does duty as the prison. It is soon to be done away with, and all the prisoners will be transferred to the central prison at Podgorica. Smiling warders welcomed us and conducted us to their living-room, barely furnished and with an array of revolvers—the property of the prisoners—hanging on the walls. A female prisoner prepared us coffee, and while we were sipping the inevitable beverage a glance through the window showed us men busily sweeping the courtyard of the prison.

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First of all a warder showed us the fetters—heavy, cumbersome irons, which are riveted to one or both ankles, according to the sentence. But it is only in exceptional cases of aggravated crime that this severer sentence is meted out to the offender. Then we were conducted by the main and only entrance into the courtyard, two sides of which contain the cells of the prisoners. These gentlemen rose with alacrity to their feet as we entered, evidently much pleased at the honour of our visit. Only three men were chained, and of these one remained moodily seated, staring indifferently on the ground before him. He formed such a contrast to his fellow-prisoners' smiling faces that we observed him closer, noticing that his clothes were such as the officials and better class wear.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"A Government clerk convicted of embezzlement," was the answer. "Six weeks in chains is his sentence."

"And what have the other criminals done?" was our next query.

"Oh, they have mostly quarrelled amongst themselves. They are not criminals. We have very few thieves and robbers in Montenegro. This youth," went on our informant, pointing to a young man with a pleasant face, and who grinned with joy as he noticed the attention with which we favoured him, "has a ten years' sentence for quarrelling."

"But quarrelling," we repeated. "Is it punishable to *quarrel*?"

"Yes, too many lives are lost," was the laconic reply.

"Oh," we exclaimed, a light breaking in upon us, "you mean murder! They are all murderers?"

"We have no murderers," came the indignant response. "Our land is as safe from murder as any other in the world. No one kills to rob or steal in Montenegro. But we just quarrel amongst ourselves. We are hot-blooded and shoot quickly, that is all."

P. and I looked at each other, but neither of us felt inclined to venture any further remarks; so we examined a dark cell with interest, without furniture or light, and one of six used for the worst kind of offender, *viz*. the political. They were all untenanted. We had all crowded inside, our warders as well, and as we emerged again into the strong light, I noticed the gate wide open and no visible guard.

"You have left the gate open!" exclaimed P., as he saw it.

Our warders laughed. Afterwards we understood.

Then we inspected a common cell, where about a dozen men sleep. Each man brings his own bedding and nicknacks, with which he decorates the wall above his bed and makes the place as much like home as possible. Loss of liberty is the only real punishment, and even that is not carried to an excess. The Prince has said that the restraint that they suffer is enough, and thus the prisoners have comparatively free intercourse with the outside world, plenty to eat, and on festivals wine and even spirits and a dance with their friends outside. This latter scene we witnessed some

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time afterwards on another visit to Cetinje. The only real severity is the chains, but these sturdy mountaineers soon accustom themselves to these thirty-pound trinkets, and when photographed take good care to arrange them tastefully and prominently. When we lined them up for a picture, we demanded a front place for the chained men, to their intense delight and the chagrin of the others who cast envious glances at their more favoured brethren. No doubt in that moment the unchained men wished they had gone just a little further in their "quarrel."

After a pleasant half-hour with these quarrelsome gentlemen, we went round to the ladies who occupy a wing of the prison, with all windows and doors facing outwards on to the open ground. Again no fence or wall marked a limit to their prison, and they walk in and out of their cells at leisure. However, there is a boundary marked out by posts and trees, beyond which they may not go. As we appeared they were sitting about, singly and in groups, knitting peacefully in the warm sunshine. We again inspected their quarters, and learnt that the odd score of women represented the total crime of the land.

[Illustration: THE FEMALE PRISONERS]

A blushing and gratified array of staid matrons and coquettish girls faced the camera, again only one young maiden of fifteen or sixteen showing any sense of shame, and she fled into her cell, only to be ruthlessly ordered out by a warder.

Soon afterwards we took our leave, and as we crossed the small unenclosed square before the men's prison we found it crowded by the late inmates of the courtyard, walking merrily up and down or chatting with friends on the outskirts, over which neither party may step. Only the dismal clanking of a chain here and there proclaimed to the casual observer the fact that they were prisoners. Lithe, active, and athletic men, none of whom fear death, and guarded by four warders in the loosest possible fashion, yet they never attempt a dash for freedom up the rocky slope which reaches down to their very promenade ground. Flight would entail their escaping from their country altogether, never to return, and that no Montenegrin has ever been known to do. Even though they work for years in strange lands, they invariably return to their rugged native mountains and end their days in peace. And so they serve their time in patience, and go home at the expiry of the sentence "without a stain on their character."

Many months afterwards we chanced to arrive in Cetinje on the occasion of a great feast. A stranger happened to be with us, a German, and we were showing him the sights. Naturally we also wended our way to the prison, hoping to be able to give him the unique spectacle of the prisoners strolling freely up and down their garden. As we neared the square sounds of singing and music assailed our ears, and in front of the women's quarters a large ring was swaying to and fro in the national dance termed "kolo." Men and women were performing together, otherwise the sexes are kept

severely apart, while others sat around in groups partaking of wine and food which their friends or relations had brought them, and they all sat chatting and laughing together as though this were their natural state of existence.

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“The prisoners,” I said, pointing to the dancers.

“Nonsense,” said the German.

“Come nearer and listen,” I answered, for even I had my doubts for the moment; but my ear had caught the clanking of chains above the wild music.

They were the prisoners right enough, and many of the men moved heavily and awkwardly to the slow rhythm of the motion. It is not easy to dance with such ornaments as are provided free and gratis by the paternal Prince to curb an exuberance of spirits.

[Illustration: THE PRISONERS DANCING]

A great trial that the photographer has to undergo, be he professional or a strolling amateur, is the immediate demand for the picture. The mysteries of dark rooms and developing are not to be lightly explained, and the refusal to show the picture, for which the vain Montenegrins have so willingly stood, is accounted churlish. They are only appeased with a promise of a picture a few weeks later. Their names and addresses are hurriedly scribbled and handed with many peremptory requests for the picture to be sent as soon as possible.

Just before we left Cetinje, on our way to Podgorica, during our first visit, a bowing and deeply humble individual accosted us in the hotel. When he had straightened himself up a bit, and we could see his face, we recognised one of the prison warders. After many expressions of sorrow for disturbing us, we gathered that on the occasion of our visit to the prison only three of the four warders had been present. The fourth—and it would appear the head warder—had arrived after our departure, and learning of the photographs and his omission, had made things a bit hot for his three favoured confreres. Therefore would we of our goodness come and photograph him, and thus make life worth living again? Would we restore the peace and harmony of that little community?

With sorrow we declined, our carriage awaited us, and the day was hot. Some other time, we said. And with that uncertain comfort he was forced to be content.

“But,” he said, “the money which you have so generously given us and the prisoners has been expended on ‘raki’ (local spirits). We and the prisoners will pray for your souls for many nights ere we sleep.”

As we drove up the ascent from the town towards our new destination, we glanced back at the red-roofed little capital and noticed the low, grey stone building of the prison.

“We ought to sleep well to-night,” remarked P., nodding towards it.

It is something to be prayed for, even if only by criminals of the quarrelsome type.

CHAPTER V

The view from Bella Vista—New scenery—Promiscuous shooting—The market in Rijeka—The shepherds—Their flocks—Wayside hospitality—The plain of the Zeta—The Moraca—The Vizier bridge—Old war-marks—First and last impressions of Podgorica.

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The drive from Cetinje to Rijeka, and from thence till the final descent to Podgorica, is quite as fine as any other part of Montenegro. For about twenty minutes after leaving Cetinje the road climbs and attains its greatest altitude on this tour, and at its highest point—only half an hour's walk from the town—possesses one of the most striking and beautiful views. It is rightly called "Bella Vista," and a shelter hut and chairs are thoughtfully provided for the visitor.

A wonderful panorama meets his eye as he suddenly reaches the top. A fantastic sea, as it were, of hills, like the waves of a storm-tossed ocean, encircles him, and at his feet, green and wooded, lies a long fertile valley. Stretching far away into the gates of distance in its vast expanse, glitters the Lake of Scutari. Round a small dim spur of land running into the lake, lies Scutari itself, which is, however, not visible. To the left a forbidding chain of magnificent mountains, dwarfing the intervening hills into insignificance, fascinate him by their repellent grandeur. Snow-clad, except in the height of summer, these mountains seem symbolical of the land they border, that savage and unknown Albania. A glimpse of a green valley below can just be caught, there lies Podgorica, our destination. At our feet a long, low-lying plateau ends abruptly in a wall of rock, through which the road vanishes, and which can be traced white and threadlike on the overhanging hillside. Beyond is the valley and town of Rijeka. The mountains to the right are the Rumija, behind whose naked comb is the deep blue Adria, and which we must climb to reach the port of Antivari. The lake is dotted at the near end with islands, distinguishable amongst which is a conical-shaped hill crowned by a fortress. That is Zabljak, the whilom capital of Crnagora, and home of its ancient rulers, the Black Prince dynasty. The whole view is like a map in bas-relief.

Gone now are the barren rocks and sparsely vegetated hills of the Katunska, and we are now in the fertile middle zone of Mediterranean vegetation, which includes the valley of the Zeta right up to Niksic.

As we careered along, we were closely followed by another carriage, in which were crowded five Montenegrins and Albanians, who were evidently bent on making the pace. The Montenegrins are ever reckless drivers; they dash round sharp corners at full gallop, with a precipice of several hundred feet below—and there is never sufficient parapet to prevent a carriage dashing over—so that one involuntarily leans to the inner side of the carriage with that uncomfortable sinking feeling which can be experienced at sea. With a shout to warn anybody coming up the hill, the driver cracks his whip and dashes round each corner with a sublime indifference to danger.

Whenever we slackened, our pursuing carriage came up at a rush, and its occupants emitted wild yells and vociferated polite requests to pass. Off we tore again, and at last reached that point where the descent begins in serpentines to Rijeka. When we were tearing along a lower level of the road, but a few yards below our rivals, we noticed with momentary misgivings that they had drawn their long revolvers and were holding them in their hands.

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Suddenly they began to fire, for no apparent reason, which habit is apt to be startling to a nervous traveller on his first journey. But our youthful driver let fly an answering shot; on inquiring he told us that it was to encourage the horses. Afterwards we never rode or drove any distance in the country without our revolvers, so that we too might help in the encouragement.

That afternoon Rijeka presented a brilliant picture. On entering the town hundreds of peasants were congregated round the cattle-market on the outskirts, but it was on the broad street by the river bank that the most animated scene was to be witnessed. Every Montenegrin town should be seen on a market day, for then the peasants from far and near, in their best clothes and rifles over their shoulders, flock to the town with cattle and sheep and field produce. Rifles are usually carried when going on a long journey, particularly in the vicinity of Albania. This is partly as a sign of allegiance to their Prince, but chiefly because Montenegro stands ever before a sudden mobilisation. Should the soldier peasant hear the alarm, he must make his way at once for the rendezvous as speedily as possible, without detour. Further, hundreds of armed Albanians from the borders are always in their midst, as was the case to-day.

Rijeka is a very busy little place, being the half-way village between the capital and Podgorica, and is still more important as the starting-point of the little steamer which plies twice weekly down the lake to Scutari. The river runs between lovely green hills rising straight from its banks, wooded and luxuriant, reminding one not a little of the Thames at Cookham.

The Prince has a small palace just beyond the town, and spends the coldest winter months here, where he escapes the rigours of the climate in Cetinje. About half-an-hour's walk is the ancient fortress of Obod, famed in history as the site of the first printing-press (destroyed very soon by the Turks) in the Balkans, and indeed one of the first in the world, for Caxton was only a few years ahead. The fact speaks for the ever forward striving spirit which has animated Montenegro's rulers since its very foundation, and which only the rigours of pitiless warfare have hindered.

On leaving the pretty little township, we had considerable difficulty in forcing our way through the flocks which continually blocked the road. All the way we ploughed through herds of cattle and stampeding sheep and goats, much to the disgust of their shepherds. These men, chiefly vicious-looking Albanians, with loosely-slung rifle, and round their waist a bandolier of cartridges, lend a wildness to the lonely road which is likely to mislead the new-comer; and should one of them empty his revolver light-heartedly in the air, to be answered by another some distance away, the impression is considerably heightened.

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The road climbs to a good height immediately and commands a fine view of the valley with the little river winding in and out. In winter the effect is that of a great flood, for everywhere partially submerged trees and bushes show above the water. But in reality it was only a natural course of events, for in summer the water recedes and leaves great fields on which crops of maize are grown, while during the winter or rainy months the whole district of fertile land becomes again submerged. This view of the Rijeka was decidedly one of the prettiest in the country, combining, as it does every now and then, glimpses of the lake and the majestic Albanian Alps.

Always followed by our rival party, we halted at a wayside inn to refresh both man and beast. These inns are quaint little places. There is seldom any other floor than that already provided by Nature, which has been beaten flat.

We called for coffee, and partook of the country's wine, to whose acidity we never accustomed ourselves, and entered into conversation with our convivial companions. One, a horse dealer, spoke excellent Italian, and we met him often afterwards in the course of our travels.

When we had finished our libations, we naturally wished to have the bill or rather to know how much there was to pay.

"Nothing," was the answer.

"But we have had ——" It is not well to particularise—it was a thirsty day.

"There is nothing to pay," the woman reiterated.

The other party had guiltily slipped out of the room and climbed into their carriage, and our driver became impatient to maintain the lead. With mixed feelings we followed him out, and in another second were off again at a gallop.

It was always like that in Montenegro. We have gone into an inn or cafe and drunk a liqueur (a polite name for the fiery but wholesome local spirit), when a fresh glass will be silently placed before us. We have waved it away.

"Not ordered it," we would say.

"That man has," answers the boy, and points at a smiling Montenegrin on the other side of the room. Sometimes, and very often too, other guests follow suit, and the result is trying. We gave up visits to cafes afterwards, except when we were on pleasure bent and had an hour to spare. Hospitable, reckless, poverty-stricken Montenegrins—one can travel far before another such a race can be found.

The last two hours of the drive are uninteresting, chiefly because eight hours in a carriage is trying. Podgorica comes in sight long before it is reached, in the form of a

cluster of trees on a grassy but dead-level plain, out of which two minarets show their graceful spires. The background is imposing, lowering Albanian mountains rise abruptly to their lofty heights from the level of the plain.

For an hour we drove along the plain, and passed a solitary building situated on a slight eminence. It was Krusevac, one of the Prince's country palaces, or, to be more correct, Prince Mirko's palace, as "Voivoda" or Duke of the Zeta, which ancient and historical title is his. Then for some distance we skirted the Moraca, driving in an opposite direction to Podgorica till we came to the "Vizier" bridge, over which we crossed and retraced our way to the town.

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The River Moraca is a large mountain torrent, into which the Zeta flows only a short distance away from the town. It rushes over great boulders, forming here and there formidable rapids, between two deep banks, which, without any warning, break off suddenly from the flat and form precipitous sides fully two hundred feet deep. Two or three hundred yards away, no gap or break in the plain is observable. Sometimes the river swells almost to the top of its banks, and then the effect must be terrible. There is a ford near Podgorica, which the peasants use to avoid the long detour by the bridge, but woe to the man who makes a false step. Three women, carrying loads of wood, lost their footing during our stay, and were drowned. In its waters we swam every evening, and even in midsummer, when the river is low, the strength of the current required an expert and powerful swimmer to breast it, and it was invariably very cold.

[Illustration: THE VIZIER BRIDGE]

The bridge, built by an old Turkish Vizier many, many years ago, is most picturesque, and completely in keeping with the rocky banks and the foam-flecked, emerald-green waters rushing beneath. From this bridge a man once sprang into the depths below, to show that he was not intoxicated. As a matter of fact he was, but he emerged dripping a hundred yards lower down, unhurt and at least in his right mind.

There used to be a deep indentation in a stone of the bridge parapet—during our stay in the country it has been plastered up—which credulous Montenegrins relate to be the cut of a Turkish horseman pursuing a fleeing Montenegrin. The story goes that the Turk severed the Montenegrin's head from his body, and so violent was the stroke that he cut into the stone wall as well.

Again, just before the town, two slabs, standing exactly thirty paces apart, mark a similar episode, and the headless man is said to have run that distance before falling. This legend—which, furthermore, has many eye-witnesses still living in the town who swear to the truth—is more capable of belief if one takes into consideration the flight of a decapitated fowl in any of our poultry yards.

The road entering Podgorica is very similar in appearance to that which leads into Cetinje, only the first impressions are considerably wilder and more uncivilised than that of the capital. Hundreds of Turks and Albanians are smoking their evening "tchibouque" in the streets, and scowl in no friendly manner at the stranger. Some of them, namely, the merchant class, are, however, excellent people, travelled and educated, as we found out afterwards. The Albanian and Turk are the enterprising merchants of Montenegro, and improve on acquaintance, which is sometimes necessary.

We had a lonely, solitary feeling as we drove through the crowd of loiterers, and were glad to descend at a presentable-looking hostelry. How often first impressions are wrong we proved to the full in this instance.

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Podgorica saw more of us than any other town during our stay, for we made it afterwards our headquarters. It would be difficult to forget that mountain-bounded valley and the town with its bustling streets of picturesque humanity. And then those sunsets! The peaks towering behind bathed in crimson, and the intervening hills rising one above the other to the furthermost summits like a giant staircase, rich in a mysterious purple. As we walked back from our evening swim, over the short, springing grass, that scene at sunset never abated its charms one whit. And we were always glad on entering the town that no one wore plain, ugly European clothes but ourselves. The national costumes, so full of colour, blended harmoniously with our feelings, and have left behind them an indelible picture.

CHAPTER VI

Podgorica—Its central position—Our headquarters—Easter in Montenegro—Our experience of it—We view the town—The prison and its inmates—Christian and Mahometan friction—The modern town—The market and the armed buyers—The Black Earth—Easter customs—Montenegrin methods of doing business.

[Illustration: GENERAL VIEW OF PODGORICA]

If it were not for the dangerous proximity of the Albanian border, Podgorica would have been made the capital of Montenegro. It is favourably situated for a trade centre, and, owing to this fact, has naturally gathered a large population (the largest in Montenegro), approaching ten thousand. Lying on a rich and fertile plain, within easy reach of the Lake of Scutari, and connected by good roads with Cetinje and Niksic, it is within market distance, so to speak, of Kolasin and Andrijevica. From these districts, and from the Albanian borders, the people flock in crowds, and the Podgorican market is by far the most important in the country. But—and it is a big “but”—in this case the Albanian frontier is only an hour’s walk away, and it would never do to risk the persons of the Royal Family and the Ministers in a sudden Albanian raid, and troubles and disturbances are of everyday occurrence.

We made Podgorica our headquarters during our sojourn in the land of the Black Mountain mainly for its central position, but also for the opportunity afforded us there for studying Montenegrin life.

It would be difficult to forget our first visit to the town. It was Easter Sunday evening when we arrived at the Hotel Europa, and after seeing our luggage carried in, started out on a tour of inspection, and also to present our letter of introduction to Dr. S., the veterinary surgeon of Montenegro. We had not got more than fifty yards from the hotel when we were forced to beat a hasty and ignominious retreat. At Eastertide, which is one of the biggest feasts in the Greek Church, beggars, halt and maim, blind and tattered, pour into all the larger towns of the country. They come from Turkey, Albania,

Bosnia, and Dalmatia—in fact, from everywhere within reach—and make a rich harvest, for the Montenegrin opens his heart, his hand, and his house at Easter. In our innocence we imagined this to be the normal state of affairs in Montenegro, and were greatly cast down.

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But our worthy host armed himself with a big stick, and we sallied forth again under his guidance. Even then it was no joke, and the house of Dr. S. came as a haven of refuge. Anyone who has been in the East knows what an amount of persistency and endurance the Oriental beggar possesses.

[Illustration: THE RIBNICA]

We were received as old friends and welcomed to the Easter table, which was set, as in any other Montenegrin house at this season, for anyone and everyone who has the remotest claims of acquaintanceship.

Several men were present, to whom we were at once introduced; amongst others a canny Scotchman, the only Britisher living permanently in the country. We were a cosmopolitan gathering. There was Dr. S., a Roumanian, an Austrian ornithologist, a Scotchman, our innkeeper was a Macedonian, and two or three Montenegrins. From that evening date many of the pleasant friendships which we made in Montenegro.

The next day our newly-made friends showed us Podgorica. It is divided into two distinct parts—the old, or Turkish town, and the new Montenegrin town, which dates from the conquest of 1877. The two halves are separated by the River Ribnica, which flows in a deep bed before the crumbling walls of the Turkish quarter. At one angle of the town the Ribnica enters the Moraca, Montenegro's biggest and most important river.

Most picturesque is the old Turkish quarter, still surrounded by the same bastions and walls which not so long ago defied the Montenegrin army. But the houses, as well as the walls, are fast falling to ruin; for at the order of the Prince the market has been removed to the other side, and, in comparison with the new town, there are few inhabitants left. The fortifications still bear witness to the fierce struggle which took place before them, and one bastion was breached more successfully than ever Montenegrin cannon had done, by lightning, during the bombardment. Many of the older inhabitants, as well as the walls, show traces of the former conflict, a noseless man being no great curiosity.

Not for nothing has the Montenegrin won his fame as one of the fiercest fighters in the world. He was never outdone in atrocities by his enemies. It was the rule of war (and is now, to a great extent) to either behead one's prisoner on the spot, or, if the day had been exceptionally heavy, and more heads could not be carried conveniently, noses were taken instead. Perhaps the phrase "to count noses" originated in these lands. However, it usually ended the same, for the noseless man would, as a rule, bleed to death; but some have lived through it, and can be met with anywhere in Montenegro or Albania.

Many fierce fights took place in and about Podgorica, and the ghastly picture of victorious Montenegrins at the conclusion of an affray, sitting in groups, each with a

small or large heap of heads and noses before him, “counting the bag,” has many eye-witnesses still living.

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In the Turkish town lies the prison, soon to be the only one in Montenegro. A new wing is rapidly nearing completion to accommodate the female prisoners, who are at present incarcerated in Cetinje. We visited the director that Easter Monday morning, and were received unofficially in his quarters. We always had great fun with that man—a pompous individual filled to overflowing with the importance of his position, and, not unlike men similarly afflicted, most aggressively stupid.

As a great favour, and after our united persuasion, he allowed us at last to look from a window overlooking the courtyard of the prison. As in Cetinje, the prisoners walk without let or hindrance in the spacious walled-in courts before their cell doors. Being Easter no man was chained, a privilege they owe to the Prince, who always releases the prisoners from their fetters during the great festivals; one wretched individual, however, we noticed more heavily manacled than even a murderer of the worst kind. He was, we were informed, a dangerous madman, though, poor devil, he looked harmless enough, slouching round and round the yard. The primitive custom of confining dangerous lunatics (for the harmless are allowed their full liberty outside) in the common prison is soon to be done away with. A large lunatic asylum is rapidly nearing completion near Danilovgrad—another memorial of Prince Nicolas' improvements.

The prisoners were sleek and fat—those imprisoned for long terms or for life bearing witness of the good treatment which they receive at the hands of the authorities. One youngish man in particular attracted our attention, a merry laughing fellow whose girth had reached alarming proportions. He was imprisoned for life, and his crime, which sat so lightly upon him, had been a particularly atrocious and dastardly murder for plunder—a crime practically unknown in Montenegro.

Imprisonment is more real here than in Cetinje. There is none of that delightful promenading up and down before the prison walls, hours pleasantly whiled away with a friendly visitor from afar over a pint of wine. The only glimpse of the outside world that these prisoners obtain is when a few of them fetch water daily from a well outside the walls.

As we gazed upon the strange scene from the window above, of prisoners and warders amicably chatting together, others squatting in groups over a harmless game, a horrible voice disturbed the serenity of the picture. Then at a closely barred window a face appeared, with matted hair and long unkempt beard. It was the face of a madman; with terrible curses he filled the air, and we looked inquiringly at our cicerone.

"That man is a political offender," came the answer. "For fifteen years he has waited his trial, and now he has become hopelessly insane. Many years ago he endeavoured to stir up a revolution against the Prince, and fled to Vienna, where he carried on his treasonable propaganda. But he was enticed back, and thrown into solitary confinement such as those who are traitors to their Prince receive. For an hour every

day these prisoners are allowed to walk in the yard, but this man from the first refused to avail himself of the privilege, and now he has become what you see."

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“Will he never regain his freedom?” we asked.

A shrug of the shoulders was all that our guide vouchsafed, and with that awful voice ringing in our ears we were glad to turn away.

Two mosques still exist, and are in use, for the Turkish population is fairly large, though owing to recent events rapidly diminishing, but the Prince does everything in his power to cultivate a friendly feeling with the Mahometans. His country is the asylum for the persecuted Turk as well as the fugitive from justice, and, if his crime is political, he will be warmly welcomed.

But, Woman again has upset the best of intentions, and within a year four elopements of Turkish girls from their homes with Montenegrins have taken place in Podgorica. These girls have been baptised and married to their Christian lovers. A worse insult to the Mahometan faith does not exist. But of this more anon.

The modern town is painfully plain and uninteresting. Montenegrins have no knowledge or love of architecture. Each house is built solidly of stone, square and undecorated. Even the palaces of the Royal Family are of puritanical simplicity externally.

There are the law courts, post and telegraph offices, and police-station all in one, a school, and a market-place, with a very ugly memorial to the fallen Montenegrins in the last war. Otherwise, the town is laid out with broad streets, all planted with trees, exactly like a South African township.

Building plots are free, the only obligation to the owner being that he must run up the outside walls of the house at once. The roof and internal work can be completed at leisure. A large part of the town consists of mere shells of houses, the owners waiting for the means of completion.

Some little distance from the town, across the Moraca, is the Prince’s palace of Krusevac, which he occasionally visits. It stands quite alone on a slight eminence.

The view round Podgorica is one of the most fascinating features of the place. It is one of those perfect views which never tire, and always present some new beauty, and the armed rough men in their brightly coloured and novel costumes are in complete unison with the picture. These national costumes seem so absolutely fitting to Montenegro that the otherwise plain and uninteresting buildings of the town are turned merely into a background for the ever-moving stream of colour. The Turkish bazaars with their gaudy wares hung out into the street, the red-jacketed Montenegrin, the Turk in pure white, the Scutarines in their distinct and original costume, and the Albanians who flock in hundreds to the market in coarse white serge, heavily bordered with black braiding, rifles over their shoulders and a bandolier round their waists, make a never-ending picture. We never wearied of wandering about the streets on market days. Then the

town is filled to overflowing with a multi-coloured crowd, and every man from a distance brings his rifle.

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How odd it looked at first to see an Albanian with perhaps a shilling's-worth of field produce spread out before him, and at his side a rifle loaded and cocked; or, again, a Montenegrin boy of perhaps fourteen, with his rifle across his knee! To keep order in this formidably armed crowd of men, many animated with the fiercest racial and religious hatred of each other, are some dozen Montenegrin gendarmes, armed, as is every Montenegrin, with but a heavy revolver.

Deadly enemies meet on the market-place, men standing in blood feud with one another, and speak, often expressing a fervent prayer soon to be able to put a bullet into the other at the first opportunity, but—outside the town. Podgorica is mutually held as neutral territory, and is very rarely violated. This is strange where men fear not death.

But, outside, perhaps but half an hour from the outskirts of the town, these men will meet and shoot and kill; for murder, or sudden death, to use their euphemistic way of looking at matters, is by no means uncommon.

There is a great tract of land about an hour's ride from Podgorica characteristically called the "Crna Zemlja" or Black Earth. It is neutral, lying between Montenegro and Albania, and the man who sets his foot on it carries his life in his hands. Men who know, say that every inch is soaked in blood. It is overlooked by some small hills from Albania, and is covered with long pampas grass, affording good cover for a man, and they shoot there for love of killing.

But to return to Eastertide.

It is a good time to visit Montenegro for first impressions. The Montenegrin outdoes himself in open-handed hospitality; every house is open, and everyone visits his neighbour. The best chamber in the house, as often as not the only living-room among the poorer classes, is set out with all the good things the owner possesses. On the table stand meat, eggs, bread, wine, and spirits; and it is a grievous insult to leave that room without tasting, and tasting liberally, of all. This lasts three days, and it is more than enough.

And we were particularly honoured, being Englishmen and strangers: one might say we were painfully honoured. What quantities we were forced to eat and drink! At one house, that of a poor man, who lived with his wife in a tiny room, we were presented with a bottle of Munich beer, his greatest treasure, given him once by a friend who had travelled. He doubtless considered it a luxury of a priceless kind, and it cut us to the heart to drink that man's beer. But we had to; he took no denial, barely tasting it himself.

We might have stood it fairly well were it not for those eggs, hard-boiled Easter eggs, the shells coloured red or blue. This institution is a positive torture to the unfortunate digestion, which suffers untold torments at Eastertide.

There is a game played with these hard-boiled eggs which reminds one forcibly of schooldays. Two men each select an egg, and one, holding his egg firmly, allows the other to endeavour to crack it, only the pointed ends being used.

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But this harmless if childish custom once led to a vendetta. A man once cracked such an enormous quantity of eggs, that in the evening he was challenged to show his marvellous egg, which he persistently refused to do. This led to words and words to revolvers, and the man was shot. Then the egg was found to be a clever imitation in stone.

Though Podgorica is the trading centre of Montenegro, business is not carried on in the same brisk way as in other lands.

We once wished to send a parcel of feathers home, and went accordingly to the post office. It was towards evening then, and we were informed that the postmaster was "not at home," and were asked to come next day. The following morning we again visited the post office, when the contents were carefully noted, and long lists filled out which took roughly about half an hour; at the end of which time a head was thrust out of the window, asking us to call in about an hour and pay. This was because no post-office clerk is allowed to receive money; he is strangely enough not always honest, and the postmaster was again out. At the end of the hour we returned and paid.

Another time I tendered a gulden in payment of a telegram, and had to wait a quarter of an hour while a boy was sent into the town to obtain change.

In matters of business it is well to possess one's soul in patience. A more unbusinesslike set of people is hard to be found, yet in driving a bargain they are remarkably shrewd, to put it kindly.

Even in such trivial matters as purchasing a hen no indecent hurry is shown. Such a transaction may take days. For instance, you wish to buy a hen, and signify the same to a man, and he will say—

"I have a hen which I can sell thee, but it will break my heart. Such a hen, and such eggs! I feel I cannot part with her."

"Very well," you say; "don't make yourself miserable; I'll buy one somewhere else."

"But give me till to-morrow. It is too sudden."

And he goes away. If you are not in a hurry, it does not matter and you wait. It is amusing.

Next day he will come again and say that he has another hen nearly as good as the first, but, as he loves you and respects you, he will part with his beloved hen at a consideration, and names a price far beyond its worth. You refuse, and state your price for the *good* hen, the ordinary market price, which he indignantly refuses and departs. In a few hours he will come again, bringing a hen which, almost with tears, he tells you is *the* hen—his beloved hen.

“Take her,” he says, “as a present.”

Whereupon you press upon him the market price, which of course he takes, and the matter is finished.

Such little episodes are trying at first. The Montenegrin loves money—it is his curse, or rather the curse of every country on the brink of civilisation—but he also loves to play the gentleman, who hates sordid money transactions. He will often make you a present and afterwards send in an extortionate bill.

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But, usually, you make him a monetary present *at once*, which he takes with thanks, at your own price.

If it were not for money, what an ideal race the Montenegrins would be! But then that is the same with a good many people.

CHAPTER VII

Medun—Voivoda Marko—His life and heroism—His part in Montenegrin history—Our ride to Medun—His widow—We visit his grave—The death dirge—Montenegrin customs at death—Target practice—Our critics—The hermit of Daibabe—We visit Spuz—A typical country inn and a meal—The Turkish renegade gives his views on warfare—Dioclea.

During our repeated sojourns in Podgorica we made several excursions to places of interest in the neighbourhood, chief amongst which was a visit to Medun, Voivoda Marko Drekalovic's grave.

Medun lies in the heart of the mountains, about four hours' ride from Podgorica, and is the capital (if one can apply such a high-sounding name to a ruined fortress and two or three houses) of the Kuc. The Kuc is a large province inhabited by one of the most warlike tribes of Montenegro, and only recently came under its rule, though their sympathies were never with their Turkish rulers. The fact that it borders on Albania is significant, and accounts for its fighting qualities.

Voivoda Marko was largely instrumental in bringing about the last war with Turkey, which was so successful to Montenegro, when the Kuc, Podgorica, Niksic, the entire provinces of East Montenegro, the Brda, and the sea-coast from Antivari to Dulcigno were won and confirmed to Montenegro.

The famous battle of Fundina was won by Marko and his tribe alone against an overwhelming Turkish army before war had been officially declared with Montenegro.

Beginning life as a shepherd boy, Marko ended his days as Voivoda (or Duke), and his name is famed in many a song and beloved by the Montenegrins as one of their greatest heroes. Many were the stories of his reckless bravery, which one of his relations told us. Before he had reached the age of twenty he had killed many Turks in single encounter, and was in consequence outlawed. He lived for some years in the mountain fastnesses of his land, and together with a handful of adventurers, who had cast in their lot with his, made descent after descent on any bands of Turkish soldiers that happened to pass through his domain. His fame soon reached the ears of Prince Nicolas, who sent for him and placed him for some years in his bodyguard—that *corps d'elite* of the Montenegrins.

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At the age of twenty-five he returned home and harassed the Turks to such an extent that he could not show himself openly by daylight. Like another and more famous outlaw in the days of the kings of Israel, all those that were bitter of soul came down unto him, and he became captain over them. By night he descended upon the Turks wherever he could find them, and made great slaughter among them. The Governor of Podgorica, then Turkish, Yussuf Mucic by name, offered a large sum of money for his head, but no one could be found willing to meet that terrible man whom legend and story had endowed with supernatural powers. Finally, a criminal consented to attempt the deed on the promise of his liberty, and this led to one of the most incredible episodes in Marko's life. The criminal lay in wait for him on a lonely part of the road near Rijeka, and as Marko was passing along he stepped suddenly on to the road pistol in hand. Marko in no way attempted defence, but simply transfixed the man with a glance. The wretched man in an ecstasy of terror shot himself, so penetrating was the glance which the Voivoda had given him. So runs the story. Suffice it to remark that Marko arrived safe and sound the same evening in Cetinje, and a dead criminal was found on the next day by the roadside. Now Yussuf, the Governor, was himself a soldier of some repute, and when he heard of the failure of his messenger he boastfully expressed a desire to meet the celebrated Marko in single combat. On this challenge being reported to him Marko rode off on a half-tamed steed at midday into the heart of Podgorica, and reined up before the Pasha's house. In fear and trembling the Turks hastily closed their bazaars and houses as that fearful horseman galloped through their streets. In a loud voice Marko cried—

"I am here, Yussuf, to answer thy challenge. Wilt thou now come out and fight with me?"

But fear filled the heart of the craven Turk, and he sent a woman to the window to say that he was away from home. Marko knew this to be a lie, and cried so that all should hear him that henceforth the challenge was annulled. "I do not fight with cowards," he said, and again galloped away unmolested.

Such was the power that superstition had weaved around his person that he was commonly believed to be invulnerable, which belief was afterwards belied by the fact that he carried two bullets with him to the grave.

After this public insult to Yussuf, it was known that he would spare no pains to take Marko's life, and a touching episode is told of the love which Marko's tribe bore to him. His people were ever ready to sacrifice their lives for him, and in this instance it was deemed necessary to remove the obnoxious Pasha. Accordingly a cousin of Marko journeyed to the Podgorican market with a pistol concealed in a load of wood. He lay in wait before Yussuf's house and shot him down as he emerged. The Turkish populace literally cut him to pieces—a fate which the devoted man well knew would befall him.

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This and other events led up to the attack made by the Turkish troops on the tribe of Kuc, when, at Fundina, Marko and his small tribe smote the Moslems hip and thigh. The rest is a matter of history. He had died but a few months before our visit, and by his last wish was buried in the little fortress of Medun, which many years ago he had stormed at the head of a handful of men under circumstances of great bravery.

The ride thither gave us our first taste of the mountains. Rough, stony paths through rocky ravines, sometimes skirting deep precipices, and all round the intensely wild and magnificent mountains, led us to the great gorge where Medun is situated. Perched on a seemingly inaccessible crag, stands the famous ruined fortress, and at its foot Marko's house.

We were made welcome by his widow, a regal woman of middle age, and still strikingly handsome. Her dead husband was not only a great hero, but a poet and historian, and one of the most remarkable features of his life was that, at the age of forty, he taught himself to write, and made his name famous as well in the Serb literary world. He had always treated her as his companion, and not as the average Montenegrin treats a woman—as a being of inferior quality and a better class of servant. Marko had a wonderful character; a great athlete, perfect rifle-shot, and a military warrior and leader of men, he brought home during his campaigns over one hundred Turkish heads; but he was also a refined gentleman, a true poet, and merciful to his enemies. He was a notable exception in the matter of prisoners—he always let them go unharmed, sometimes escorting them himself to a place of safety.

Our visit gave much gratification to his widow, who was pleased that strangers from such a distant land should wish to visit her husband's grave, and she was hospitality itself.

After a rest and food in her house, she conducted us herself up the steep winding path to the grave. We came abruptly upon a small plateau in front of a tiny chapel. The scene was striking in the extreme. There was the grave, with a rough pile of stones at the head, on which were placed the dead man's "handjar," revolver and sword, and many wreaths. Two lighted candles were flickering in the wind, and in a semicircle stood a group of rough, fully-armed mountaineers, the retainers of the Voivoda. It was stormy, and great gusts of wind and rain dashed round the rocky fortress, and in the distance a rugged pile of mountain peaks towered up into the descending mist.

The widow left us, and, kneeling at the grave, quietly kissed the cold stones, praying for a few moments in deep silence. Not a man spoke or moved as we stood with bared heads and waited. Slowly rising, she came to us and led us into the chapel, a bare shell, not even furnished with an altar, and with the original earthen floor.

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“My beloved husband wished to be buried in here,” said the widow, “but it was not allowed. The Prince wished him to be buried in Podgorica, as he was never courtier and was so beloved and honoured by his people—more than the Prince himself. But my husband called me to his side, and with his last breath made me swear to bury him in this chapel, or at least in front of it. And when the order came that he should be buried below, I swore to shoot myself on his grave, and the men of Kuc swore to take his body up here, even if they had to fight every inch of the way. So it was allowed that he should be buried here, but we shall bury him in the chapel, for that I promised him as he died.”

And she took my hand solemnly in hers, illustrating her oath to the dying man, and I shivered in that gloomy chamber as her impassioned voice echoed in its arches.

Suddenly a wailing of women broke upon the utter silence which ensued, and nearer and nearer came that weird singing as it approached the summit. The women were chanting Marko’s death dirge. At last, as they passed the little window, we went outside and saw four women, dishevelled and weeping, approach the grave, kneeling on one side. The widow left us again and knelt alone opposite.

One woman only sang at a time, a series of extempore verses telling of the life and deeds of the hero—his accomplishments and goodness—in the poetical language of this wild people.

“Oh, thou grey falcon, who was so mighty a hunter as thou?”

“Who indeed shall now wield thy bloodstained sword?”

“Oh, thou wolf, who is worthy to take thy place as our ruler and father?”

And the others beat their breasts and tore their hair, wailing in a wild unison, until the singer was exhausted and then another began.

Here and there a deep sob broke from a man, but otherwise the ring of men with bowed heads remained in dead silence and immovable as the rocks around them.

It was one of the most impressive scenes it has been our fortune to witness, but we were glad when the widow rose and conducted us back to the house. Some letters and poems of the Voivoda were shown to us, and one of the letters to a friend then present in the room was read aloud. The great rough Montenegrin was so touched at hearing the words of his master and lord, that he turned away his head and sobbed. All this time the women ceased not with their wild lamentations, and even after we took our leave and started on our rough ride home in pouring rain, that death dirge followed us, echoing in the ravines and mountains.

[Illustration: THE GRAVE SCENE AT MEDUN]

Since then we have often heard the death dirge sung in Montenegro. Sometimes in a house in passing; again, an old woman trudging to market will sing the death dirge of a relation, perhaps dead many years. But we never heard those piercing, wailing notes without having the picture of Medun recalled vividly to our memory.

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When a man dies he is laid out in the sitting-room, and all the friends and relations are summoned. Then the men enter the room singly and approach the corpse. Tearing open their shirts they beat themselves with their fists on their naked breasts, often tearing the flesh with their nails, and give vent to ear-piercing wails. Each new-comer strives to outdo his predecessor in excesses, and horrible scenes ensue. But the Prince discountenances this custom, and it is slowly dying out, but only in the upper classes.

We often took our rifles and went out into the country for a little target practice, and always succeeded in attracting a group of spectators from adjacent villages or huts. Towards Albania we were requested not to go for shooting, as the noise of rifle-shots is apt to mislead the surrounding villagers. Even when shooting in other directions, we were carefully warned not to fire rapidly, but to shoot slowly and deliberately, as at target practice.

Rapid firing is “the alarm,” and would mobilise a brigade of infantry within an hour or two.

On one occasion we were shooting at a somewhat difficult object about one hundred and fifty yards away. We were trying to hit it, standing, and had not succeeded. A group of some twenty men had collected, and they soon began to make facetious remarks. One offered to bring the target nearer. Another said he would stand target for a few shots—we shouldn’t hit him. So we gave one or two of them our rifles and told them to hit it. Immediately they selected stones as rests, and lay down for their shot.

“Ah,” said we, “we can do that; shoot as we do, standing, and without a rest.”

“That,” they said, “is not shooting—who shoots like that in war?”

But we were inexorable, and needless to say they failed to hit anywhere near.

The Montenegrins are good shots enough, if they can take long and deliberate aim, steadying their rifles on walls or rocks, but otherwise they are miserable marksmen.

Quite close to Podgorica there lives a hermit, a wonderful man who has hewn out of the living rock a tiny chapel, a store-room, and a passage leading to the chapel. He has only just completed it, and we inscribed our names in his new book as his first visitors.

[Illustration: VOIVODA MARKO]

[Illustration: SIMEON POPOVIC AND HIS CHAPEL]

The hermit, a priest of most refined manners and appearance, named Simeon Popovic, was most delighted at our visit. He spoke Russian and French fluently; his story is quite a little romance.

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Before he took Orders he had been a soldier, and was a rich man. It was while he was absent on a campaign that his wife eloped and his relations robbed him of all his money. He returned home to find himself wifeless, dishonoured, and a beggar. Then he became a priest, and a vision appeared to him, showing him Daibabe, where he now lives, commanding him to go and build a church. He refused the offer of a rich priorship and came to this place, possessed of no means whatever wherewith to commence his life's work. Unable to buy building materials, he began to hollow out a church from the rock, without help or money of any kind, beyond that given him by the pious but direly poor peasants of the neighbourhood. The labour must have been immense, but there it stands a monument to man's perseverance and faith.

Simeon is reckoned as a saint by the peasants; they come to him from all parts of the country, bringing their sick, and many cures are said to have been effected there. He is a vegetarian, and subsists solely on the products of his little garden.

Spuz lies on the River Zeta, and must be reached by a bridge. It is always safer to dismount when crossing a Montenegrin bridge, off the main roads. This was no exception, but the scenery was delightful. Rising immediately at the back of the village is a steep hill crowned by a mighty fortress. It was held formerly by the Turks, and the peasants say that it was built by them; but the architecture is distinctly Venetian and an exact counterpart of many fortresses in Dalmatia.

It is strange, however, for there are no records that the Venetians ever came further inland than Scutari.

The inn at Spuz, where we dined, was as other country inns (or krcma, or han, as they are locally termed from the Turkish): earthen floor, a bench, a few primitive stools and beds in the only reception-room. The table is invariably rickety, so are the stools; but a tablecloth, knives and forks are always mysteriously produced for guests even in the most out-of-the-way places.

While our repast was being prepared we had a revolver shooting competition outside the door, to which the whole village flocked. One of the men made a very fine shot from his saddle at a tree-stump in the river, about two hundred and fifty yards away, and *hit* within a few feet. It proved the accuracy and carrying distance of the Montenegrin revolver.

[Illustration: SPUZ]

After our meal, consisting of raw ham, eggs (oh, those everlasting eggs!), and a peculiar and nondescript kind of meat, about which we asked no questions, the village captain called on us and bore us off to his house for coffee.

This man, a Turkish renegade, was one of the most interesting men whom we met. He was a marvellous talker—in fact, he never stopped during our visit. How the subject came up has passed my memory, but suddenly he rushed out of the room and brought back a handful of little medals.

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“Look,” he said, “each medal represents a human life, a head. We have these given us for every head we bring back in war. Do you think I am proud of them, and there are more than fifty? No, I weep when I see them. When I had seized my foe by his hair preparatory to cutting off his head, a vision of his mother, his wife, and his sisters appeared before me, and I could have wept as I struck off his head. Why should I kill this man? I asked myself. I know him not, he has done me no harm, yet because it is war, arranged by princes and kings, we must become murderers. And why should I kill him? because others would misconstrue my act of mercy if I did it not, and brand me a coward, aye and worse, a traitor. Why should *I* make that mother childless? why must *I* rob that loving wife of her husband? Why *I* be the means of making those little children fatherless and orphans?”

I confess the picture that he conjured up of solemnly and with streaming eyes cutting off his enemies’ heads—and he had owned to over fifty—as he thought of destitute homes and weeping women and children, seemed decidedly tragi-comic; but the old man was earnest enough, and was quite unconscious of the grim humour of the situation.

“Why,” he went on, excitedly pacing the room, “why do not the German Emperor and the King of England fight out their quarrels *alone*? Why drag thousands of men from their homes and farms to fight *their* quarrels?”

Again the idea of our King fighting a solemn duel, with perhaps Maxims, over a question of an island in the Pacific, with the German Emperor, while admiring millions looked on and applauded, caused a smile which we with difficulty repressed from diplomatic reasons.

He took his scimitar now in his hand.

“Look, too, at the generals,” he said excitedly, “directing battles from safe places, while hundreds of innocent lives are thrown away in an assault which that general has ordered from his place of safety. Once,” he went on—“I was fighting for the Turks then, and commanded a body of soldiers—a general came to me, saying, ‘Storm that hill,’ and I answered, ‘No; thou art our leader, lead us to the assault.’ And he refused, saying, ’How can I direct the battle if I lead this attack—who shall take my place if I fall?’ And I drew my sword”—and here he suited his action to his words—“and said I would kill him if he did not take his true position as leader of men and lead us to the attack—then I and my men would follow wherever he went. And the general, who was a brave man, led us to the assault and fell—but we took the hill and the battle was won.”

It was strange talk to hear from such a man, little better than a savage, yet unlike any of his adopted countrymen. That man in a civilised country would have made himself known and even celebrated.

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Not far from Podgorica, at the junction of the rivers Moraca and Zeta, lie the remains of the once famous Dioclea or Dukla, as it is locally called. The town is of Roman origin, and was surrounded by a complete moat, which the Romans formed by digging a channel between the rivers. It must have been a place of immense strength in the olden days, but successive generations of warfare, which raged so pitilessly in this district, have levelled it to the ground, and to-day little or nothing can be seen from the adjoining roadway. On approaching there is also very little to be seen, here and there a wall, and small fragments of mosaic floors. Coins and other relics are still found in large quantities, and it seems a pity that excavation, which could do so much, has been only carried on in a very halting and desultory manner. Legend and history relate that the famous Roman Emperor Diocletian was born here, and gave his name to the town. The district of Dioclea, which was one of the seven confederate Serb states formed by Heraclius to repel the attacks of the Avars, is in reality the germ of modern Montenegro.

CHAPTER VIII

Achmet Uiko tells his story—Sokol Baco, ex-Albanian chief—Shooting on the Lake of Scutari—Our journey thither—Our frustrated nap—Arrival at the chapel—-The island of Vranjina—The priest—Fishing and fishermen—Our visitors—We return to Podgorica.

One market day, walking through the streets of Podgorica, we overheard a strange conversation. A Montenegrin Turk was sitting on a stone, when two Albanians approached him. Touching his revolver, one of the Albanians said—

“Sooner than own the whole of Montenegro, would I empty *this* into thy body.”

The Turk, a small man, with slightly grey hair, looked up, and said indifferently—

“And thy desire is mine.”

So they separated.

Almost immediately an acquaintance joined us, and we asked him the meaning.

“That man,” said he, “is the famous Achmet Uiko. A terrible man, who has killed many men, and at the present moment there is an enormous sum of money on his head in Albania.”

We then went to him, and asked him to come to our hotel to-morrow, and to tell us the story of his life. He consented readily, saying that he would be with us at nine next morning, “if,” he added significantly, “nothing occurred to detain him.”

It happened that evening that an Englishman arrived on a short tour through the country, believing firmly that everything was as safe and as orderly as the average stranger thinks. A Turkish girl had been abducted from her home shortly before, and the town was in a state of great excitement, as it was the second case within the last few weeks. A rising of the Turkish inhabitants was feared nightly, and the house where the girl was confined—previous to her marriage with her Montenegrin lover—was carefully guarded by a score of armed Montenegrins.

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We took the Englishman to this house, and as we were showing him the men with rifles around the doors and windows, we heard sounds of a sharp rifle fire some distance away on the border. Not long afterwards a Montenegrin doubled into the town with a report that heavy firing had been taking place at the village of Dinos. Nothing further came of it, but our countryman went to bed with other ideas of Montenegro.

We awaited Achmet next morning, but at nine he had not arrived, and we began to wonder, as the hours went by, if his fate had at last overtaken him. But at noon he turned up, as quiet and self-possessed as yesterday, and excused himself in the following way. The Albanians who had expressed such murderous desires upon him yesterday at the market lived in Dinos, and he had spent the night in emptying his magazine rifle repeatedly into their village.

“To show these dogs,” he concluded, “that they cannot express such wishes to me with impunity.”

His story, which is given shortly here, was taken down from his lips, but it is impossible to reproduce the man’s quaint phraseology. He spoke in an indifferent way, and detailed all the circumstances in a most matter-of-fact manner and without the faintest trace of boasting.

He was born in Podgorica, then Turkish, and at fifteen fought in his first battle, killing three men. At seventeen he had a fight in the town, and was forced to flee to Scutari, where, shortly afterwards, he entered the Turkish service as a gendarme. He took unto himself a wife, but finding her faithless, he laid a trap to catch her and her lover together, when he killed them both. After this Achmet returned to Podgorica, where he was at once seized and imprisoned for his original offence, but he soon broke out and fled to the Albanian mountains. Here he lived as a robber until things began to get too hot for him, and he fled to Bosnia. In Bosnia he was the guest of a Serb, who befriended him, and when a Turk seduced his benefactor’s wife, he killed the Turk to show his gratitude, and again was forced to flee the country. He next turned up in Antivari, where he was promptly imprisoned, but he overpowered the warder, took his rifle, and again escaped.

At this time the town captain of Dulcigno had been murdered, in revenge for a deadly insult, by a young Kuc, named Jovan, and Achmet was sent for, on the promise of pardon if he would follow Jovan into Albania and kill him. This he did, bringing Jovan’s head with him as evidence. For this he received a large reward, and the Prince of Montenegro, having heard of him and his deeds, sent for him, pardoning all his previous offences, besides giving him one hundred napoleons.

Achmet now settled down at his present home near Podgorica, but was caught by the Turks and imprisoned on a false charge for four months, when he was able to prove an alibi.

Achmet fought in many border fights with the Montenegrins against the Albanians and distinguished himself greatly. Two Albanians once attacked the son of a famous standard-bearer, whose life he saved, capturing the assailants alive and bringing them into Podgorica. For this act the Prince gave him an old fortress for his home, and where he still lives.

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Later on Jovan's brother, whom he had killed near Dulcigno, came early one morning to Achmet and fired at him; but Achmet caught him, and again brought his prisoner alive into the town, where he received ten years' imprisonment. These deeds are all the more remarkable as he brought his captures alive and delivered them over to justice. It is, firstly, not customary to take men alive; secondly, the feat is of extreme difficulty, for men fight to a finish in these lands.

Achmet is known to disappear periodically for several weeks, but of these affairs he would say nothing. But the most striking and romantic episode of this marvellous man's life has yet to be told.

Recently he was caught by his now arch enemies, the Turks, and imprisoned in the powerful fortress of Tusi, a few miles from Podgorica. Not content with putting on the usual extremely heavy chains, they added to their prisoner a second set of fetters. But friends smuggled into his possession a file, concealed in a loaf of bread. He filed through his chains, and the day previous to his escape he noticed a lot of straw bedding lying at the foot of the fortress walls. That night he completed the filing of the fetters, broke open the cell-door, and rushing through the sleeping soldiers he jumped the wall, landing without hurt on the pile of straw bedding below. Though fired at and pursued, he escaped unhurt.

We heard many such stories, but the story of Achmet was certainly the best, and these men do not lie. As the man took his leave, he gave us a pressing invitation to visit his fortress home in the mountains.

"I will slaughter my best lamb," he added, as a special inducement.

There was another highly interesting personality living in Podgorica, an ex-Albanian chief and refugee from his country, named Sokol Baco. This fine old fellow, standing well over six feet, looked fifty instead of his sixty-five years, and had an equally interesting past. As a youth he had fought in many battles for the Turks, and was eventually selected with five other young men of high standing for the personal bodyguard of the Sultan. While on leave, which he was spending in his Albanian home, the order came for the disarming of the whole of Albania. Sokol's tribe refused, as did most of these warlike clans, though Sokol advised obedience. But his clan remained obdurate, and he was placed in the awkward predicament of being either considered a traitor by his countrymen or by his Sovereign. Sokol threw in his lot with his clan, and led them in battle against a Turkish force; but though he fought like a lion, the clan were defeated, and he was forced to fly. For many years Sokol lived in the Albanian mountains, half robber and wholly patriot; but the pursuit became too keen, and he came to Podgorica, where he entered the service of Prince Nicolas. His new Prince he serves loyally, and is highly esteemed in Montenegro, where he will doubtless end his days.

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[Illustration: ACHMET UIKO]

[Illustration: SOKOL BACO]

While still comparatively new to the country, we once went for a week's shooting to the Lake of Scutari. Water-fowl abound there in marvellous numbers, consisting chiefly of crane, heron, thousands of duck, and a fair number of pelicans.

We had selected the island of Vranjina for our headquarters, known in history as the site of a famous treaty signed there between the Montenegrins and Venetians in the first half of the fifteenth century. It lies at the north or Montenegrin end of the lake.

As we were given to understand that we could drive to the lake, or at least to the River Moraca, and thence take boat to the island, we loaded our carriage with ample luggage. With our guide's usual and admirable mismanagement, we were landed after a two hours' drive on the banks of the Moraca, unable to get further without the carriage toppling down a steep bank into the rapid river. The driver unceremoniously bundled our traps on to the ground and drove happily off. The only person in sight was a diminutive girl, whom the guide promptly impressed into our service, and an appalling load was heaped upon her. Then a small boy appeared, and so we were able to make another start. The day was exceedingly hot, but we got some shooting to make up for it. We crossed the river in a crazy ferry, found some men, and later on a boat, and reached the famous village of Zabljak about one o'clock. The village is still overlooked by a formidable fortress, but in the rude collection of huts it was hard to see the ancient capital of Montenegro, the home of the famous Black Prince dynasty.

One of the most wretched inns that it was our lot to find in Montenegro received us and our baggage. The village of course turned out to inspect us, and watched us eat our meal with interest. It was of the usual kind, consisting of eggs, raw ham, eggs, and dessert of *more* hard-boiled eggs, washed down with a remarkably sour wine.

After this repast we retired for a short nap into the room beyond. P. was tired and got on one bed, but I, displaying more caution, lifted the pillow before I trusted myself to the arms of Morpheus. My fore-sight was rewarded better than I deserved, and I had P. off his bed in the twinkling of an eye. As an explanation which his threatening attitude demanded at once, I silently lifted his pillow. It likewise teemed with life, and we postponed our post-prandial slumbers till a more fitting occasion.

At the foot of the village the Moraca flowed past, now a formidable and swiftly running river. We were amused to see several oxen driven into it, and swim serenely to the opposite bank.

Only one small canoe could be found for us, which would ordinarily hold one man besides the two paddlers, with comfort. Into it were crowded three men and a quantity

of baggage. In addition, it leaked, and periodically we were turned out on to a muddy and marshy bank while the canoe was bailed out.

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This end of the lake is very curious, a series of natural canals run in all directions through vast swamps which only afford foothold in the height of summer. The thrifty peasants utilise the dry season to plant fields of maize, for the scorching sun dries these swamps in a very short space of time. In the winter or early spring, they are nearly or quite under water. As the lake is reached, small islands of dense willow trees grow out of the water, and in these islands are vast colonies of waterfowl. The effect is decidedly pretty, but very irritating to the sportsman, as the birds hide in the centre, and it is nearly impossible to force one's way in, even by wading.

We reached our destination, a little chapel with a house for the priest adjoining it, locally termed a "manastir," built on a rather high and conical hill on the south end of the island of Vranjina. The view from the chapel, as we afterwards found, was superb. The whole lake spreads out in its vast expanse. Scutari, or rather the hill behind which it lies, can be seen dimly in the distance. To the right, the Lovcen and the Rumija rear their lofty heads, and divide the lake from the Adria beyond. Away to the left the rugged snow-clad Albanian Alps stretch as far as the eye can see, piling themselves up in a wild and grand confusion. Several green submerged willow islands lay at our feet, round which crowds of snow-white cranes were circling. Such was our view as we reached the plateau in front of the chapel that evening, tired, hungry, and irritated, but still appreciative.

The priest, or "pop," clad in the national costume, as indeed are all the country clergy, and only distinguishable from his wild-looking parishioners by his uncut hair and beard (the Greek Church do not allow their ministers to cut their hair or beards), met us in a friendly manner, but absolutely refused to take us in at first. He said he had absolutely nothing in the house but a little goat's cheese, and no beds. However, we were desperate; to go to the village meant another hour's cramp in the canoe, and perhaps no better accommodation than here. Here we would stay, and starve.

By dint of much persuasion, the priest produced a mattress, and a man was sent down to the village to procure anything that he could find, and so we stayed in the monastery a week, and really enjoyed ourselves. We used to go out shooting at daybreak in canoes with two paddles apiece, and again in the evening, for the heat was overpowering about midday.

[Illustration: THE POP OF VRANJINA]

[Illustration: AN ALBANIAN GIRL]

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The method of fishing here is distinctly interesting. A large number are required to work the net, but they make enormous hauls. The procedure is as follows: One large boat is anchored near the shore and made fast to trees, and a huge net is taken out and spread in a circle, the ends being kept in the stationary boat. Two men, naked, stand a few feet from the boat in the water, keeping the sides of the net down and preventing the escape of fish as the circle is gradually narrowed by the men in the boat slowly pulling it in. The last bit requires their united efforts, for it is full of fish, some of considerable size. At the conclusion of the “haul” one of the men chose two of the largest fish and threw them into my canoe as a present; as thanks I lent my tobacco-tin, which they gratefully emptied.

Montenegrins carry tobacco in a tin and roll their own cigarettes; no other form of smoking is known amongst them, except the tchibouque by some of the older men, a relic of Turkish times. The tobacco is excellent, being often equal to the best Turkish, and ridiculously cheap.

We owe these worthy fisherfolk thanks for having given us one of the finest moonlight effects that it has ever been our lot to witness. We were returning home late one evening in our canoes, and as we rounded a corner of the island we came suddenly on their encampment. The men in their ragged but artistic costumes were sitting round numerous camp-fires cooking their evening meal on the bank, which sloped gently upwards, an old ruined fortress or “kula” forming a background.

As we gazed the moon came slowly over the brow of the intervening hill, illuminating the scene with its soft and silvery radiance, blending fantastically with the ruddy flames of the fires. Cooking-pots steamed and bubbled, and one group of men broke into an old Montenegrin fighting song, the water of the vast lake sparkled and danced in the distance, and we felt that only we and this rough group of fishermen were alive in the world.

It was an idyllic life that we led during our stay at Vranjina, though every comfort known to civilisation was lacking. We lived as did the hardy fishermen of the island, and a hard life it proved to be. The heat, however, was something tremendous, quite precluding any exertion from ten in the morning till the late afternoon. We had even in the early morning to use the greatest care to keep our necks and arms covered from the scorching rays of the sun, for bad blisters and burns were the sure reward of carelessness. The concussion of rapid shooting combined with the heat often brought on headaches so violent that to fire another cartridge was exquisite torture. One thing we did not suffer from, and that was loneliness.

The news of our visit spread to all the neighbouring villages, and we had a constant stream of visitors. Our swim, which we took after our early morning shoot in a delightfully cool spot, where a spring bubbled into the lake, was invariably witnessed by

a group of fishermen, and very much amused they were too over our hair-brushes, soap, and other toilet articles.

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They sometimes ascribed powers of healing to us, and were evidently quite distressed when we endeavoured to impress upon them our entire ignorance of medicine. Once a man insisted on baring his leg and showing me a horrible wound which would not heal.

Another time the school was marched out from the village of Vranjina, probably to have an object-lesson in geography. Doubtless the boys, after having seen real live Englishmen, would henceforth display an intelligent interest in the position of the British Isles. They came and spent a morning with us, and the young teacher, who spoke good Italian, asked us many questions, such as a young child asks his father, and equally difficult at times to answer.

Our messing arrangements were of the simplest, raw ham and eggs forming the staple food. We bought a lamb once, but it only lasted one meal, as everyone developed an extraordinary appetite—the parson, Lazo our servant, and all the men in the vicinity.

When we left we had the blessing of our worthy priest and fervent invitations to return again soon from some of the fishermen. One of the men took a great fancy to us, urging us to come to his house in Vranjina then and there, and “we would,” he said, “drink gallons of wine,” going on next day. “At any rate,” he said, as we gently refused, “let us have a big drink together when ye come again.”

We arranged our return to Podgorica ourselves, and got back within five hours, shooting a fine pelican on the way, which was the last shot that we fired on the Lake of Scutari.

CHAPTER IX

Stephan our servant—Virpazar—The drive over the Sutormann Pass—Antivari and Prstan—The beauty of the bay—We are delayed by contrary winds—We are rowed to Dulcigno—We make the acquaintance of Marko Ivankovic—A story concerning him—We shoot together—An episode on a lake—Vaccination—The Turkish inhabitants.

For our journey to the sea-coast towns of Antivari (Bar) and Dulcigno (Ulcinj) we deemed it advisable to take a servant with us, and our choice fell on Stephan, a Hungarian by birth, but a ten years’ sojourn in the Land of the Black Mountain had completely Montenegrinised him, if we may coin a word. As he was our constant companion for several months, it would be well to describe him.

Every statement that Stephan made had to be liberally discounted—this we found out afterwards—for he was a born liar, and not a skilful one at that. He had one marvellous story about a large sum of money lying in his name in a bank in Hungary, which he must fetch in person, but he could never save enough money to make the journey. This was an obvious falsehood. But the story of his coming to Montenegro seemed true. He was

a sergeant of an Austrian infantry regiment, and had attempted to cut down his superior officer in a fit of rage, severing his ear with a sabre. He fled to the Montenegrin border, which was quite

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close to his garrison, and has been in Montenegro ever since, wearing the national costume and married to a girl of the country. Stephan was certainly a most violent-tempered man, but he was often entertaining, full of fun, a decent cook, and could sing a host of odd songs and snatches picked up in Austrian garrison towns. Otherwise he was a thorough Montenegrin, though he considered himself vastly their superior. His temper at other times would be vile, but the mastery over himself was really great, and after a sharp remonstrance he could change his mood completely.

Taking the omnibus of the Anglo-Montenegrin Trading Company, rudely dubbed “the Hearse,” to Plavnica, the station for Podgorica on the Lake of Scutari, we transferred our luggage to a huge barge, or “londra,” and were slowly punted out on to the lake through one of those extraordinary canals which intersect the marshy land at this end of the lake. There the good ship *Danitza*, owned by the same company, awaited us, and conveyed us to Virpazar, past our island of Vranjina and its little chapel.

[Illustration: VIRPAZAR]

Virpazar is the scene of the Montenegrin Vespers in 1702, and one of the richest villages in the district. Prettily situated up a long estuary of the lake, it is nothing but a collection of about twenty small houses, with arched ground floors, the people living on the first floor. The village is frequently flooded in the winter.

The importance of this village lies in the fact that it is the connecting link—and a very bad one at that—between the rest of Montenegro and the sea. But no road connects it with the mainland, and travellers from Cetinje or Podgorica must take the steamer from either Rijeka or Plavnica to Virpazar, and from thence a good road leads over the Sutormann Pass to Antivari. A road which is being built between Virpazar and Rijeka will supply a long-felt want. At present, when the Prince or Crown Prince wish to visit their favourite residence on the sea at Topolica, near Antivari, the horses have to be sent by a roundabout mountain path from Rijeka, taking many hours, while the Princes take steamer and have a tedious wait in the inn at Virpazar.

To this inn we went—there was no choice about it; it is the only one, and, moreover, there is but a single room for guests, serving as dining and sleeping apartment. Though we arrived at midday, we had to wait till the following day at noon for the postcart—-twenty-four hours in this very uninteresting hole.

But we hobnobbed with the local grandees, for there is the district law court here (the captain and magistrate have their residences in the village), and managed to pass the time fairly agreeably. In the evening we sat under the trees in front of our humble yet princely hostel, and talked of many things to our newly made friends. The frogs in the marshes made a terrific noise, almost drowning our conversation.

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Next morning we entered the post-chaise, in which we had wisely booked all the four seats, and made a start on our six hours' drive. What would have happened had other travellers arrived is hard to imagine. A wait of forty-eight hours till the next post went would have probably caused annoyance, and this carriage was literally the only means of conveyance on this side of Montenegro. It goes one day and returns the next. Fortunately, passengers are extremely rare. The drive was of great interest, winding up in a series of sweeping curves between magnificent hills. The ridge on our left was the site of a great battle in the last war, when a small Montenegrin force dislodged a large Turkish army and captured Antivari and the long-coveted sea. The danger and recklessness of the feat was apparent from the road, and it was evidently not expected by the Turks, for a false step on those rocky heights meant certain death.

[Illustration: ANTIVARI ON BAR]

The top of the Sutormann Pass (2,700 feet) was reached in about four hours, and now the deep blue Adria was spread out before us, and our tortuous descent commenced. Commanding the pass still stands a mighty but much-battered fortress, taken by the gallant Montenegrins in that memorable battle. But nowhere could the historical old town and fortress of Bar, or Antivari, be seen. In fact, not till we were within a few hundred yards of the town, was a single house in view. It is hidden from sight in a hollow, surrounded by a forest of olive trees.

All of a sudden the carriage drew up at a recently built stone house, ornamented with the trophies of war. Piles of cannon-balls, old cannon, splinters of shells are tastefully arranged on the walls. Immediately in front of us stood the once famous fortress of Bar, now a shot-riddled and ruined mass of stone, a mere shell of its former strength.

Even then the town is hardly apparent, but in a few seconds one enters it down a steep and slippery path of well-worn stones. On either side are Turkish bazaars, out of which Turkish faces peer at the infidel dogs. There is very little of the Montenegrin element apparent. We only walked through the town once, as our destination was Prstan, the actual seaport of Antivari.

We were somewhat rudely disillusioned. After an hour's drive along a flat and ugly road, we espied a collection of some half a dozen houses. Two or three of them are large and modern in appearance but that was all. Was this, then, Antivari, Montenegro's important seaport and the bone of contention with Austria?

Right well has Austria maintained its control of this little port. One large house is that of the Austrian Vice-Consul, who lives in solitary state, watching everyone who passes through the port. Opposite, on the further horn of the bay, lies Spizza, an Austrian military station. Antivari is, indeed, but Montenegrin in name.

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Right on the shore and in the centre of the large bay stands a white house, a short distance from the Austrian frontier, which is Topolica, the favourite residence of the Crown Prince. Square, undecorated, and uninteresting, it is almost an exact counterpart of the other Montenegrin royal residences. Yet its position is superb. From either corner of the bay, where the mountains meet the sea, stretches an unbroken chain of mountain peaks, rugged and forbidding, but extremely picturesque. Witnessed at sunset when the soft lights mellow the sharp outlines, and the sombreness of the mountains is tinged with red, the fascination which this place holds for this lover of nature, Prince Danilo, can be well understood. We spent two days revelling in its wild solitariness.

Our hotel was distinctly quaint, but we were very comfortable. Again we had but one room for all, but it was clean, and the hostess, an Austrian, an excellent cook.

We hoped to have started on our further journeys the following day, and found a small sailing vessel anchored in the bay; the captain consenting to take us on to Dulcigno. It was an Albanian boat, manned by about half a dozen cut-throats, and in spite of warnings we arranged to leave next day. Anything would be preferable to a ride of eight hours over mountain tracks on mules to Dulcigno; and we were all well armed.

But the next day brought contrary winds, and we were forced to spend another day in Prstan. That day a large Italian steamer arrived and anchored in the bay, to take Prince Nicolas to Italy for the christening of his little granddaughter. Shortly before dark he arrived, attended by two adjutants, and after speaking a few words to the harbour captain, who respectfully kissed his hand, embarked in a boat, and was pulled on board the steamer. We were again struck with the immense breadth of his figure, clad in a long, grey military overcoat, which makes him look much shorter than he really is. He is really a typical-looking prince of a race of freeborn mountaineers. As he receded from the shore, we drew our revolvers and joined in the parting fusillade, shouting “Zivio” as lustily as any of the little handful who had awaited him.

The agent of the Austrian Lloyd Steamship Company came to our rescue on the following morning, as the Albanian boat made no preparations for starting, and offered to take us in his own boat to Dulcigno. This we gladly accepted, and about midday started in his large and roomy boat, built for sailing or for rowing, and manned by four Montenegrin sailors.

The wind failed us most of the way, and our four men propelled us with long oars or sweeps which are worked standing up and facing them, a method of rowing common in the Adriatic. It is a splendid exercise, but like everything else it wants practice, as we speedily found out when we took a turn.

Coffee, without which no true Montenegrin can exist, was made *en route*, and proved highly acceptable.

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Luckily we had taken a supply of food with us, though we had been told that we should be in Dulcigno for supper, and this again we devoured with ravenous appetites as the long hours wore on. The coast was monotonous, a never-varying bank of hills descending to the water's edge. Here and there a tiny village could be seen, but otherwise no life, and little vegetation.

Not till nine o'clock in the evening did we reach Dulcigno, and the impression that the lights in the houses on the hillsides made is not easily to be forgotten. It seemed like a colony of spacious and luxurious villas on well-wooded slopes. In pitch dark we arrived at a quay, and groped our way out of the boat, and were led to the inn. Great knockings and shoutings summoned the innkeeper from his early slumbers. While waiting in the darkness below, the Turkish muezzins ascended the many minarets, and began the evening call to prayer. The weird chanting from so many voices (there are seven mosques in Dulcigno) in the otherwise utter stillness had a most uncanny effect.

It was a strange arrival.

Our inn was slightly less primitive than the preceding ones. We had a tiny bedroom apiece, and there was a room downstairs for eating purposes, though we were always able to take our meals outside under the trees.

Dulcigno, or Ulcinj, is certainly the prettiest town in Montenegro, though it is to all intents and purposes Turkish in appearance. Built partly on a hill overlooking the sea, it descends into a small bay where the occasional passing steamers anchor. Well wooded and hilly, it is really a delightful spot, though the Turkish element may or may not detract from its beauty according to personal taste. The irregular houses, the mosques with their slender towers, the bazaar, and the gaily-dressed if dirty crowds that circulated between the rows of shops—gave a distinctly pleasing effect. The heavily-veiled women, wearing in addition to the veil a thick cloth cape with a capacious hood, amused us greatly, for on meeting us, lest our bold eyes should pierce their disguise, they would stop and turn their faces to the wall. What these poor creatures suffer from the heat in these ponderous cloaks can only be imagined, and Dulcigno is by no means cold.

Though the fantastic picture conjured up the night of our arrival by the twinkling lights, peeping out of the dark foliage, on the hillside was not realised, still the entirely different picture of the reality was equally pleasing.

We called the next morning on the harbour captain, an Austrian and ex-sea-captain, who received us most kindly and courteously. Through him we were at once able to make the acquaintance of one Marko Ivankovic, a hunter of great prowess, whom we immediately engaged to attend us for the shooting in the neighbourhood.

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Now, though we will not go so far as to say that he was the sole object of our visit to Dulcigno, still he did certainly influence our plans. Once, during our very first stay at Podgorica, we met an Austrian ornithologist and sportsman who told us a wonderful experience of his at Dulcigno with this very man, Marko Ivankovic. He had come to Dulcigno one night by steamer, to spend a few months in this paradise for sportsmen, and as he entered a lowly inn, a man of almost repellent aspect sat brooding gloomily, evidently lost in a fit of abstraction. This man gave no greeting to the new-comer, who sat down at the further end of the table and ordered food. Shortly afterwards the man rose and silently left the room. An hour later this same man reappeared in the doorway, cap in hand, and humbly asked permission of the ornithologist to seat himself at the same table. The permission was readily given, and the man (it was Marko) came near and attempted to kiss L.'s coat. This action signifies the greatest humility, and is only accorded to persons of the highest rank. L. remonstrated strongly, saying—

"Why dost thou kiss my coat? I am a man like thyself, and no prince. What wouldst thou from me?"

"Sir, I see that thou art a hunter (L. had his dogs with him), and I would fain be thy servant."

L. wanted a man, and from his conversation he soon gathered that this was no inexperienced huntsman, and so they spoke of terms. But Marko at first would not hear of anything of the sort, saying he would serve for nothing. Naturally L. refused to accept his services gratis, and at last an arrangement was made that Marko should first prove his capabilities and serve a term of probation. Even then Marko refused to take money, but a present of a gun or some article to the value of his services at so much a day.

With this plan L. was forced to be content, and two days afterwards the expeditions into the neighbouring country were commenced. To tell the story in L.'s own words:—[2]

"After we had been together some weeks Marko became gloomy and cast down, unlike his usual merry self. It was no easy task to persuade him to tell me what was the matter. It appeared that he was in debt, and should not the money be paid very shortly, his house and all that was his would be seized. Of course I gave him the money, which happened to be more than his due up to that day, and he took it as a loan. This condition he insisted on, and I laughingly assented."

It was then that we first heard of Achmed Uiko, who told us the story of his life in Podgorica. Jovan, of the tribe Kuc, had been publicly beaten in Dulcigno at this time, and in revenge had shot the Governor, who had ordered this ignominious punishment. Jovan had fled to Alessio, in Albania, with a price upon his head, and certain persons came to Marko to beg him to follow the assassin and bring back his head. Marko was then in L.'s service, and confided his dilemma to his master, who told him that if he but harboured such thoughts he was not fit to be his servant. Marko then refused, and

Achmed Uiko accepted, murdering Jovan in a boat while fishing, and the head was subsequently displayed in Dulcigno. This is a noteworthy episode, for it led to the abolition of corporal punishment and of the barbarous custom of displaying heads on poles.

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[Footnote 2: This story was published in the *Wide World Magazine*, and is reproduced with the Editor's permission.]

To return, however, to the story:—

"After several weeks I made a day's tour with Marko to the Bojana. At the mouth of the river, which you know is the outlet of the Lake of Scutari, a large island has been formed by a stranded ship which sank there, and all the debris, logs, and other rubbish have formed a delta of some size upon the wreck. It abounds in game, and thither we journeyed one morning early, reaching it some few hours later by a small boat in which we ferried ourselves across. During the day a great storm sprang up, precluding all chance of returning to the mainland that evening. In a hut of boughs we spent a miserable night, drenched to the skin by the incessant rain. Not till towards evening of the following day could we recross, and it was bright moonlight when we commenced our weary tramp, heavily laden and wet, to Dulcigno. The neighbourhood is dangerous, both Albanians and Montenegrins shoot at sight, and care must always be exercised.

"Perhaps we had covered half the distance, when Marko suddenly and without a word of warning threw the bags and other things he was carrying to the ground. 'It is a dog's life, nay worse, that I lead with thee. My health is ruined, my clothes spoilt, and not a kreutzer do I get.'

"I was furious at the man's infamous lie, for he was still several guldens to the good, and even more so at the disadvantage he had taken over me. Here we were alone in a wild and dangerous district, miles from home, and not a human being near.

"'Thou liest, thou ungrateful dog. Thou art an ass without a face.'

"As I said this in my rage—it is a terrible insult to call a man a faceless ass—Marko's face was transformed with speechless fury. His high cheek-bones and black curly hair always made him unprepossessing, for his was a distinctly negro type of face, and now with his lips drawn back like a snarling wolf, disclosing his yellow teeth and gleaming eyeballs, he looked like a fiend incarnate. I shudder now when I recall that moonlit scene.

"His hand dropped like lightning on the butt of his revolver, but in the moment I had sprung back a pace and covered him with my gun, which I was luckily carrying cocked.

"'Thy hand from the revolver,' I cried, 'or thou art a dead man.' Slowly his hand sank to his side. 'Pick up those things at once and carry them before me, or as sure as there is a God in heaven I will shoot thee like the dog thou art.'

"As if every movement was of the greatest exertion he picked up the traps, saying as he did so, 'Thou shalt remember these insults.'

[Illustration: MARKO IVANKOVIC]

[Illustration: THE BRIDGE AT RIJEKA]

"'Be still!' I cried, covering him with my gun, 'and now precede me.'

"And in this fashion we returned to my house. He threw the load into a corner of the room, and at the door he returned and repeated his warning, vanishing in the darkness.

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“From this time onwards I shot alone. Try as I would I could get no one to come with me, and this I put down to the worthy Marko’s influence. Thrice I saw him while out shooting, but only once within speaking distance. I then called to him ’Marko, I know thou wilt try and kill me; but listen, I am married and have a wife and child at home. For their sakes I ask thee to shoot at me from the front, and thus give me a chance to defend myself.’

“He smiled strangely again, saying, ‘Thou wilt remember thy insults,’ and disappeared.

“I always took cover when I saw him, but nothing happened, and the eve of my departure arrived. The steamer left in the early morning, and just as dawn was breaking and I was still in bed Marko entered the room. He approached my bed, and laid upon the table by my head the sum of money I had advanced him to repay his debt. Then he spoke:—

“’I saidst that thou wouldst remember the insults thou hast put upon me. Here is thy money, and now listen to my story. Thou hadst scarce set foot in Dulcigno when thy death was planned by an enemy, and I was hired to do the deed. That was why I would take no wages, for I was already well paid; besides, it was thought that thou wouldst then certainly engage my services. I was to accidentally shoot thee while hunting. What more easy than to stumble and for my gun to explode? But when I knew thee, then I could not kill thee thus. I tried to provoke thee that night, knowing thee to be a violent-tempered man; I provoked thee into insulting me. I hoped thou wouldst have struck me, and then it would have been easy. Thou wast very near death at that moment, for in spite of thy gun I could have shot thee, but thou hadst grown too much into my heart. Even in my rage I was powerless. And now here is thy money. I have kept my word, and am an honourable man.’

“I sprang from my bed and stopped him. ‘Who was my enemy?’ I cried.

“’One who knew thee in Bosnia. This man had hoped that thou wouldst visit him, and thy coffee was ready poisoned. When I left thy service another man was hired to kill thee, but I followed thee wherever thou went. Thus didst thou see me these three times.’

“I knew now who my enemy was. A man exiled by the Austrians for treasonable practices whilst I was still an official in Bosnia. Marko accompanied me to the ship, but not until I swore on my honour to otherwise throw the money into the sea would he accept it, and then only that which he had actually earned, not a kreutzer more, for I would have willingly made him a present. Thus Marko Ivankovic went out of my life, but I shall never forget him.”

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Such was the story we heard one evening in Podgorica, and which we were here able to prove in part. When Marko heard that we were friends of his former master, his face lighted up with joy, and he kissed our hands. During our stay he was always with us, a devoted attendant and servant. Another very interesting phase of his life had been spent in the Hercegovina, where he fought as an outlaw for many years against the Austrians. He still possesses two mementoes of his adventures in that land, one in the form of an officer's undress jacket, technically called a "blouse," and the other of a more permanent character, namely, a maimed hand. He and his band were surprised one night by gendarmes, and a fierce hand-to-hand fight ensued, during which an Austrian aimed a cut at Marko with his sword. Marko caught the blow on his hand and held the blade fast, but the gendarme drew back the weapon sharply and severed all the tendons of his hand. Marko cannot now open his hand, but his wounder was sped to the happy hunting-grounds there and then, as he modestly relates.

Shooting of the same kind as on the Lake of Scutari is to be found in abundance all round Dulcigno. Unfortunately the Bojana and the afore-mentioned island at its mouth was closed to us. The evening of our arrival two men had been shot there, and it is doubtful, even had we insisted on going, whether the authorities would have permitted it. It is not good to visit localities just after shooting affrays. In this instance the peasants on both sides were excited, and we reluctantly gave up the trip to which we had looked forward for some time. However, there was plenty left to shoot over, and we had much good sport with pelican, duck, and crane.

One rather unpleasant incident occurred during our stay, which very nearly ended seriously.

The lakes and swamps over which we shot lay at about an hour and a half's walk from the town, and it was necessary to be there by daybreak. We had ordered our paddlers to await us one morning at dawn, and on our arrival were considerably annoyed to find no one there but a boy. After a short wait we started, taking the boy and the larger londra, or canoe, Marko and Stephan paddling as well. A longer delay would have spoilt our morning, as the fowl disappear long before the sun is well up in the heavens. About an hour later we discerned a boat paddling furiously towards us, and, coming alongside, the inmates proved to be our missing crew. Seizing our canoe, the spokesman addressed our boy, abusing him roundly, saying he had stolen his canoe, and demanded the paddles peremptorily. The boy looked at us helplessly, and naturally refused, for we were in the middle of a lake. The man then became livid with rage, rocked our canoe violently, threatening to overturn us into the water. Then his hand dropped on his revolver, and in his face appeared unmistakably the lust to kill. All this passed so quickly that we had listened to the altercation in open-mouthed

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astonishment. The rage and violence took us utterly by surprise, for nothing of the kind had ever happened to us before from the naturally courteous Montenegrins. However, now the man's rage communicated itself to us, and in the twinkling of an eye both Marko and myself had covered him with our firearms—we both had guns at our side—-and Stephan began to talk. Stephan was a violent-tempered man, and now he let himself go. He spoke for some minutes, and it was lurid. The muzzle of my carbine began to wobble, for his fluency and comprehensiveness were distinctly amusing, while our attacker, who soon let go the butt of his revolver, listened with pained but undisguised admiration. "And now, thou accursed one," wound up Stephan, after he had paid attention, in his burst of eloquence, to the man's family, antecedents, personal appearance, and probable future, "go back to the hotel, and await my master's return! Thou knowest the law. For even laying the hand on thy revolver in anger, and against strangers in our land, thou wilt be thrown into prison, and thou wilt receive ten months. I will come and see thee, and listen to the music of thy clanking chains, and we will talk of to-day's doings!" By the time Stephan had finished, abject fear was depicted on the man's face, and his companions showed signs of having heard enough. Murmuring apologies, they sheered off, and with a slow and thoughtful rhythm paddled back the way they had come.

On our return to the inn several hours later the three men were standing stiffly outside the door, cap in hand and thoroughly scared. He who had attacked us spoke tremblingly, offering as an excuse that they had fished all night and had but gone for some food before taking us out again. They were direly poor, he said, and the fear of losing their wages had upset them, the long night without sleep had destroyed their powers of reasoning, and—would we forgive them for the dastardly outrage? Needless to say we dismissed them, as do the magistrates, with a caution.

We met amongst other Montenegrin officials the district doctor, an interesting man of varied experience. At his invitation we witnessed the annual vaccination, which is compulsory in Montenegro.

[Illustration: VACCINATION]

[Illustration: BAZAAR LIFE, DULCIGNO]

Outside the door of the principal mosque the doctor and his assistants and some other officials took up their position one morning and waited. Shortly afterwards crowds of children appeared on the scene, mostly in charge of their Turkish fathers or elder brothers, some of the latter scarcely able to carry their little burdens. Very rarely a Turkish mother appeared, closely veiled, but the Christian mothers invariably came; that is, the Albanian Christians from the outlying villages. Very quaint are these women in a

most picturesque costume and carrying their infants in a cumbersome and unwieldy cradle slung on their backs. It was a very varied assortment

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of babies which was presented to the doctor, many of the Turkish children being so emaciated and such a mass of repulsive sores, that many were sent away as too weak. Most of them shrieked with fear, but a few came up smiling, one and all comforted by their protector, either Turk, child, or fond mother. The fathers invariably showed the most distressed concern. It was a comical sight; outside the rails a motley crowd of interested spectators and waiting children, and in the inclosure the doctor pricking his patients one after the other in a most indifferent manner. His clerk noted the names, and we, with some of the local grandees, drank tiny cups of coffee and looked on.

The Albanian or Turkish element is very strong in Dulcigno, and they are the only Montenegrin subjects exempt from compulsory military service. The Montenegrin authorities told us that they were very peaceable and industrious, giving no trouble whatever. It is, after Podgorica, the largest town in Montenegro, and does a lot of trade in small sailing-boats down the coast. As many as seventy-five per cent of the men are usually away at sea, carrying the Montenegrin flag as far as Constantinople. It is quite cut off from the rest of Montenegro, except by a mule track connecting it over a difficult mountain path with Antivari and the rest of the country. By sea it is connected by the Austrian-Lloyd weekly Albanian Line, and by one or two smaller steamers which occasionally call there, with Cattaro and the Albanian coast towns.

CHAPTER X

We ride to Scutari—The Albanian Customs officials—We suffer much from Turkish saddles—Arrival at Scutari, and again pass the Customs—"Buon arrivato"—Scutari and its religious troubles—The town and bazaar—A slight misunderstanding, Yes and No—We return to Rijeka by steamer—The beauties of the trip—Wrong change—The prodigal son's return, when the fatted calf is *not* killed.

Before we left Dulcigno it was necessary to have our passports vised by the Turkish Consul, as we intended returning to Podgorica *via* Scutari. We had to go through a lot of tedious formality, though the Consul was a most pleasant man, and laughed at the precautions which his orders forced him to take. But as he supplied us with horses and an escort—for the path is considered somewhat dangerous—we resigned ourselves to the inevitable with a good grace. Our guns and carbines we were forced to send back to Podgorica with Stephan, as the law is very strict against the introduction of firearms into Albania, where, however, even the poorest peasant goes fully armed. But as strangers our weapons would have been confiscated on the border. Verily the ways of the Turk are passing strange.

We made a start at four o'clock one morning just as the sun was appearing above the hills, and the day promised to be extremely hot. Our horses were fairly good, and the man who constituted our guard, an Albanian, seemed a pleasant fellow, which much belied his appearance. A more villainous-looking face, with half his teeth missing, could hardly be imagined. However, the whole way he rolled us cigarettes most industriously, rarely taking one from us. Our saddles were Turkish, and were our first experience of them, and, it is to be hoped, the last.

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The high road, or rather path, to Scutari, is considered good for Montenegro. In reality it is a mere track, in places paved with cobblestones atrociously laid. It is odd that many important districts in this country are entirely unconnected by roads with the neighbouring towns, and consequently such things as carriages do not exist. As an instance, the whole of the country lying beyond Rijeka towards the sea, containing two important towns, and in size about an eighth of Montenegro, possesses one short road —from Virpazar to Antivari—and one carriage.

Our path lay for the first three hours through a richly vegetated country, and the scenery at times was quite English, owing to the amount of oak trees which overhang the path. But at nearly every open space was a Turkish graveyard. The indiscriminate way in which the Turks bury their dead is most extraordinary.

We reached the River Bojana, and rode along the bank some time before we came to the ferry. It is a broad and swiftly flowing river of quite imposing size. The heat was now getting tremendous, and a friendly Albanian picking apricots on the roadside gave us many handfuls, which proved very acceptable.

Two Albanians came across in a large barge in answer to our hail, and we and our horses—the latter, by the way, stepping into the barge most unconcernedly—were piloted across. Here we entered Albania, and were examined by a fierce-looking Customs official. He turned our baggage out on to a mat, and evidently meant to overhaul it thoroughly, when a few *Daily Graphics* caught his eye. After that he dismissed the remainder of our things with a wave of the hand, which our men promptly repacked, and retired into the papers. A lot of other men came up, and we were pleased to afford so much delight with our illustrated journals.

As we were drinking coffee in the very primitive inn, a heavy thunderstorm came on, and deluges of rain, keeping us here for about an hour, when it cleared up sufficiently to proceed. Our landlord at Dulcigno had packed us up a meal with a bottle or two of wine at our orders, and we, now being hungry, inspected the basket. It was, to put it mildly, distinctly disappointing, and not fit to eat or drink. Added to this, my hunting knife was stolen, and we were very glad to get on again.

The rest of the ride was the reverse of monotonous. The path was now as slippery as grease, and our horses floundered at every other step, and at times we plashed through quagmires, and became bespattered from head to foot. Several men passed us with rifles slung over their shoulders, but interchanged salutations with our guard. With the exception of one small revolver, we were unarmed and practically helpless. A short time after our ride through this district, a stranger was killed. It is very unfair to refuse foreigners the permission to carry any arms through such dangerous parts, when it is considered a disgrace to go unarmed by the inhabitants. Our saddles, too, were beginning to cause us much discomfort. After the first few hours on a Turkish saddle, every movement of the horse becomes agony.

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We reached the outskirts of Scutari about seven hours after our start, and the town is entered by a great bridge. But before coming to the bridge we rode through a great assembly of Albanians, judging from their different costumes, from every part of the country, with their flocks and herds for the market. The men were lying about singly or in groups, sometimes under a rough tent, while the women attended to their wants and to the flocks. Each man was heavily armed with rifle and revolver, and turned lazily as we passed, with no friendly looks, plainly intimating that we were intruders. Still they were fine, fierce-looking men, though their expression is not nearly so prepossessing as that of the Montenegrin. It was a strange scene of life, but only one of many that abound in and about the capital of Albania.

At the bridge we had to dismount and cross on foot, and a very painful operation it proved after so many hours in the saddle.

The custom-house was situated immediately at the other end of the bridge, and here we entered. In the guard-house, full of disreputable-looking Turkish soldiers, were hung rifles and revolvers on nails in great number and variety, which the mountaineers have to leave on entering the town precincts. The custom-house official was peacefully sleeping when we came in, and had to be awakened. We were led to a divan, and cigarettes and coffee promptly brought to us while our passports were examined. In a quarter of an hour we were allowed to proceed, but a man came running after us saying that our baggage had not been examined. He gently hinted that he had no wish to examine it all if ..., and we understood. We forced a handful of backsheesh in his seemingly unwilling hand, and slowly, with many muttered exclamations, climbed into the saddles. We even did not scorn the friendly aid of a low wall, so painfully stiff were we.

A short ride round the once mighty and historical fortress of Scutari, past a ruined building liberally painted with white crosses, said to have been once the Cathedral, and where we had noticed that Christian Albanians piously crossed themselves on passing, led us to the famous bazaar.

It was not our first visit to Scutari (we had visited the town by steamer from Montenegro on several previous occasions), but as we clattered through the evil-smelling alleys filled with a surging mass of more or less unclean humanity, we were struck more forcibly than ever with the picture. At times our passage was blocked by the crowds, and misshapen figures and hideous faces would peer out of doors and shop windows at us, and swaggering Albanians would jostle each other, their belts for the most part empty, though many were armed in spite of the stringent rules to the contrary. Slowly we forged our way through this seething crowd, and emerged on the open road beyond, leading to the town proper, which lies about half-an-hour’s distance away.

At the hotel we dismissed the man (and the horses), who remarked with a certain grimness, in Italian, “Buon arrivato,” and we staggered into a meal which our eight-hour fast and torture had rendered extremely necessary.

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[Illustration: THE CONSULAR QUARTERS, SCUTARI]

Though Scutari, strictly speaking, does not belong to this account of Montenegro, it is still so interesting, being in former days part of Montenegro, that it deserves some mention.

The actual town is Mahometan, three-quarters of the inhabitants belonging to that faith; but as the surrounding mountains are all Christian, and it is the seat of the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Albania, religious feuds are common. The Christian Albanian belongs literally to the “Church Militant,” and emphasises his feelings occasionally by throwing a dead pig into a mosque. On other occasions playful Albanians have been known to tie white cloths round a fez, thereby imitating the headgear of a Mahometan priest, and so parade through the town. Very naturally the Mahometans object to it, and trouble ensues. About a year ago Scutari was in a state of siege, and closed to trade for a fortnight.[3]

The consular quarter of the town is really quite fine, and here all the rich merchants, of whom there are very many, live in large houses often beautifully fitted up and surrounded by a formidable wall. A street where such houses are situated is externally very gloomy, nothing to be seen but high walls pierced by massive gates. Behind those walls, however, are lovely gardens and imposing houses.

[Footnote 3: This has again happened since writing the above.]

The consulates are very much in evidence, with guards of splendid-looking Albanian kavasses. Politically only Austria and Italy are vitally interested in Albania, and these countries have large consular staffs and fine buildings and post offices.

Owing to the absence of the British Consul, we went to see the acting Vice-Consul, who is a Scutarine, and a very courteous gentleman. Like all the rich merchants of Scutari, he spoke Italian fluently, and through him we got an insight into the merchant houses. An extremely aged kavass, in the long white skirt or kirtle worn largely in Scutari, and with the British Arms emblazoned on his fez, respectfully kissed our hands, and we were told that he had been in English service for over forty years. But he could not speak a word of any language except Albanian.

The Vice-Consul placed another kavass at our disposal to accompany us on our explorations of the town, and gave him further permission to attend us on our proposed ride to Podgorica. This latter idea we were forced to give up ultimately, as the roads were considered too dangerous. As a matter of fact, a big shooting affray took place in the district through which we should have traversed a few days afterwards.

Quite one of the sights is Mr. Paget’s house (of Paget’s Horse fame), situated in the heart of the town. The clock tower affords a fine view, though the time that it keeps is

startling to the new-comer. As is known, the Turks have a time of their own, which has a difference of four hours and a half to our time. It is misleading to get up at an early hour, say six o'clock, and find that it is already half-past ten. And again you feel you ought to be sleeping at one o'clock at night, till you remember that it is really only about eight o'clock.

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In the bazaar of Scutari representatives of every clan in Albania can be seen, and each tribe has his distinctive dress, so that the variety of national costumes to be seen there can be imagined. The Scutarines are of course very much in evidence, clad in a jaunty sleeveless and magnificently-embroidered jacket, silk shirt, and enormous baggy breeches of black, and heavily pleated. How heavily pleated they are can be gathered when twenty to twenty-five yards of a kind of black alpaca are used for one pair of knee-breeches. White stockings and a red skull-cap—not the high Turkish fez—with a huge blue silk tassel reaching to the waist, complete the attire. Their women-folk look picturesque in a large scarlet cloak, with a hood half covering the face.

The student of Albanian costumes can make a complete study of the subject in Scutari, rendering a journey into the vast country beyond almost unnecessary.

We always took a camera with us, but with very poor results. It is against the Mahometan religion to be photographed, neither are photographers looked upon with pleasure. We did once plant our camera in the main street of the bazaar, to the great anger of a policeman who ordered us off, luckily after we had secured a picture.

When we were quite new to Scutari, it happened we were waiting for a boat to take us off to the steamer, when we were struck with a particularly fine old Scutariner in red fez and long flowing skirt. Through the medium of an interpreter, I politely asked the permission to take his picture. He solemnly nodded his head backwards, and I, rejoiced at so good a subject, hurriedly erected the stand. When I next glanced at him, his face was purple with rage, and he made a threatening movement. For a moment I was quite at a loss to understand the why and wherefore, until our interpreter hastily explained that it was against the old man's religion.

"But he said 'yes,'" I expostulated. "At least he nodded."

"That means 'no,'" said the interpreter.

"What does?" I demanded. "Saying 'yes,' or nodding it."

Then the man explained to me at some length, as I repacked my camera, that in the Orient to shake the head means "yes," and a nod—a quick elevation of the chin accompanied by a click of the tongue—is negative. This custom is largely adopted in Montenegro, particularly amongst the peasants, but even then we never quite knew if a shake of the head was meant in the Turkish or European sense. It is a confusing and irritating habit, and takes months to get accustomed to.

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Visitors to Montenegro usually spend a day in Scutari, for the route by steamer is the only perfectly safe way of entering the town. Passengers by the steamer are not required to have their passports vised, if they state their intention to the official, who promptly boards the steamer on its arrival, to return by it next day. But names and particulars are carefully noted and laid before the Governor. During this particular visit, we were already well known to the Turkish officer in charge of this department, a pleasant little fellow, inordinately proud of his French which he had just learnt; but still he worried us greatly, calling daily and even sending obvious spies to find out how long we really meant to stay and our object. We tried to impress upon him that we had no base intentions on the town, and were really quite harmless individuals, but he remained friendlily suspicious till he bade farewell to us on board the little steamer *Danitza*.

It is about four hours to Plavnica, and the trip across the lake is very fine, surrounded as it is by magnificent mountains and dotted with tiny wooded islands along its northern bank. We did not disembark at Plavnica, the nearest point for Podgorica, but proceeded *via* Virpazar up the river to Rijeka, the final station of the steamer and connecting link with Cetinje. The voyage up to Rijeka is delightful, as the boat threads her way through a narrow channel between lofty green hills. It is a picture of as true sylvan beauty, peace and quiet, as can be found on many of the upper reaches of the Thames.

At Rijeka we waited in an inn for the carriage, which we had ordered by telegraph from Cetinje to take us back to Podgorica, and were startled to hear a revolver-shot fired in the village. Everyone was running excitedly to a certain small “dugan,” or shop, and thither we also directed our steps and found a bleeding Montenegrin standing over a prostrate and insensible Turk.

What had happened was as follows. The Montenegrin had bought some tobacco from the Turk, and claimed to have been given two kreutzers (under a halfpenny) short in change, whereupon the Turk accused the other of having hidden it.

“Thou art a liar!” promptly cried the Montenegrin, and received a bullet in the thigh as an answer from the enraged Turk. Not seriously hurt, the Montenegrin, equally quickly, drew his revolver and, using it as a club, knocked the Turk insensible; in fact, he was thought to be dead. However, we afterwards heard that he had recovered.

Shortly afterwards we were spending a few days in Cetinje, and were again witnesses of the final act of another small drama which was enacted about this time.

One morning we saw about twenty Montenegrins brought into the town heavily chained, and on inquiry we were told the following story.

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A young man, whom we will call Andreas to prevent confusion, had been for some time in Austria, and not finding work he returned to his village, named Ljubotin, half-way between Rijeka and Cetinje, or, to be more correct, just below the Bella Vista in the hollow. He arrived in the night, penniless and in a desperate condition, and waited outside his widowed mother's house till he saw that all the men, his relations, had left and gone to work in the fields. Entering the house he demanded money of his aged mother, who indignantly refused him—he seems to have been a bad lot altogether—and as he threatened to take it by force, she hurriedly called in the village kmet, or mayor, to protect her. But the kmet was also aged and infirm, and brought a young man with him. This young man remonstrated with Andreas, who was breaking open the chest, and said—

"Give me thy revolver."

"Thus I give it thee," answered Andreas, and drawing his revolver he shot the man dead.

Andreas then fled out of the house into the fields, and the murdered man's relations speedily gathered together and pursued him. They espied the fugitive running and fired at him, whereupon Andreas threw up his arms and fell to the ground. His pursuers thinking him dead, left him. Andreas was in reality shamming, and crawling through the bushes saw his uncle at work and promptly fired at *him*.

This time he met his deserts, for his uncle, unhurt, returned the compliment and shot him through the head.

These shots brought the original pursuers to the spot, and seeing Andreas dead, and shot by his uncle and not by them, they began abusing the old man for taking their lawful prey from them.

He bared his chest dramatically, saying that as he knew that the vendetta must continue, they should shoot him then and there and end the matter. But they would not, and going further found another relation of Andreas; this time a young man, and the pride of the family. They shot and wounded him slightly. He fired and mortally wounded one of his attackers, which was as far as they got.

The gendarmes had come and arrested them all, and these were the men of both sides, which we had seen that morning.

As we knew several of them personally, we were doubly interested.

CHAPTER XI

Preparations for our tour in the Brda—We start—Where it is not good to be giddy—A trying ride—Our inn—Nocturnal episodes—The journey continued—Pleasant surroundings—The Montenegrin *quart d'heure*—Arrival in Kolasin—We meet the Governor—Visiting—The Band of Good Hope—The Crown Prince's birthday—We are ashamed.

The preparations for our tour through the mountainous districts of North-East Montenegro, known as the Brda, took a few days.

We had some difficulty about horses, though ultimately P. and I secured two good animals for ourselves, but the third, destined for the bulk of our baggage and Stephan, was a dilapidated apology for the equine race. As a matter of fact, it stood the trying journey in a remarkable manner.

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Then there were a few pots and pans for cooking purposes to purchase, some necessary additions with which to supplement our humble fare, and two days' rations of meat and bread.

It made a formidable pile when we reviewed it one morning at daybreak, though we had cut down our baggage as close as possible. It took Stephan about an hour to load up, and when he had finished, he had left no room on top for himself.

We carried ourselves each a carbine, revolver, and bandolier of cartridges, and a pair of saddlebags; but what with a camera, camping utensils, guns and cartridges, sleeping-coats, *etc*., the pack-horse was full up. However, there was no help for it, and Stephan had to walk the first day.

We left Podgorica about 6.30, accompanied by Dr. S., who came with us partly on business and partly out of friendship. As he knew the country perfectly, he did much to render our tour more interesting.

The mountains ascend abruptly, and our path was for some hours along the turbulent Moraca, which we met at the end of the plain. In five minutes we were surrounded by mountain scenery. Some little way up the valley a bridge is in the course of construction across the stream, and will form part of the projected road from Podgorica to Kolasin. On its completion, we were told, it would be the highest bridge in the Balkans. Men were working on a loose and steeply sloping bank of crumbling earth a few feet above a precipitous rock, which overhangs the Moraca, at a height of two hundred and fifty feet.

"They very rarely fall," said Dr. S. in answer to our unspoken question.

It made us giddy and sick to watch them. But our own position was often not much safer. The path see-sawed up and down; one moment we were splashed by the spray of a waterfall as it dashed into a creamy pool, and the next we were up on a dizzy height, with one foot hanging over a precipice, gazing on the foam-flecked mill-race below. Verily, it is no journey for a giddy man to take. A single false step on the part of the horse would send both it and its rider to a sudden death. With the ordinary mountain pony, for the horses are practically only that, it is not necessary to guide it—in fact it might be dangerous. The Montenegrin rides with a loose rein over the most ticklish ground, only tightening his grip on descending a very steep hill to help his horse when it occasionally stumbles.

Despite a slight nervousness, we were still able to appreciate to the full the grand scenery of the valley of the Moraca. It turned out to be quite as fine as anything we saw in the mountains.

About four hours after our start we crossed the stream by a wooden bridge and dismounted at an inn. Stabling our horses in the ground floor, we ascended to the upper regions where the human beings live, and clamoured for food.

Raw ham and, of course, eggs were all that was to be had, and, as it turned out, it was our only meal that day. The flies were terrible, but Dr. S. comforted us, saying that every hour would bring us to higher regions and consequently fewer flies. A prophecy which was only partially fulfilled.

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We made the best of our repast, and after an hour's rest we made another start. We left the river now, and seemed to climb a breakneck hill for interminable hours. The region was barren and absolutely waterless, while the heat was tremendous. I only remember one view during that broiling ride. We had reached a great altitude, and were crossing a narrow ridge. On one side was the Moraca, and on the other the Mala, both streams mere threads in the hazy distance.

It was the want of water that tried us more than anything. About midday we halted for a while at a small village, and under the refreshing shade of a large tree. Some young men kindly fetched us a little water in a dirty vessel, which tasted abominably.

Another long climb and we at last found shade, and rode for the rest of the afternoon through beech forests. If the path had been bad before, it was worse now, and it was a perfect marvel how the horses kept their feet. I was somewhat unfortunate in my horse Alat, who was blind in one eye, so that I always had to guide him over difficult places. This kept me for ever on the alert, and became trying. At every hut we pulled up and asked for milk, but invariably got "Nema" (I have none) for an answer. The Montenegrins are singularly laconic at times.

Now began a long descent, so atrocious that we had to dismount and climb down on foot, leaving the horses to pick their way as best they could, and about seven p.m. we reached the house where we were to spend the night. It consisted of two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom, the sole furniture of the latter consisting of two wooden bedsteads.

There was no food, except a half lamb, which Stephan had brought on the pack-horse, and its condition was unpleasant from its many hours' exposure to the sun and attendant flies. It took over an hour to cook, and by that time our ravenous hunger had passed, stilled by a few quarts of delicious milk. The inn—for such was the character of the house—unlike similar institutions of more civilised lands, had neither accommodation for man nor beast. There was no hay for our hungry horses, who had to wait for two hours while a man took an hour's climb up a mountain to the next village and brought back a load of 45 kilos (100 lbs.) on his back. A little thought can be given to this fact. Suffice it to say that this lean and athletic man took off his shirt and literally wrung the sweat from it. This, too, at the end of a long day's work. Part of the hay served for our beds, and little enough it seemed too.

P. and I were given the two beds, or rather we were forced to take them, and I turned in at once, after looking at the mutton broth, and fell asleep immediately. In the night I was awakened by a child crying in the room, and in the dim light I was startled to see the floor—empty when I went to bed—strewn with sleeping figures.

A heap that I rightly guessed was the doctor, moved uneasily.

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“Doctor,” I said softly, “are you awake?”

“Yes,” came the answer. “A small child has evidently mistaken me for its father or mother. Will you have it?”

I feigned sleep.

Other figures were snoring peacefully and emphatically, but the tiny inmates of my hay bed were painfully awake and sleep seemed banished. However, I must have slept again, for when I awoke the room was empty, except for Stephan, who was packing up. We had a wash in the stream and made a hurried breakfast, and were off by a fairly early hour. Stephan had found a horse, which must have come as a blessing to him. He had walked yesterday about thirty miles. The path was much better to-day, and we were enabled to make better pace. At a small village named Lijeva Rijeka we made a long halt to allow the doctor to transact some official business. We ate up what meat we had left, and had great fun with the village big-wigs.

Strangers are beings of rare occurrence in the mountains, and we always came in for much “courteous curiosity.” Dr. S. and Stephan enjoyed answering inquiries as to who we were immensely. One time we were engineers making plans for the new road; another time we were enterprising merchants about to open up the country; and once a man remarked, when he was told that I was the British Minister, “And wears patched trousers?” He referred to the knee pads of my riding-breeches.

Our arms, as was only natural to this fighting race, attracted great interest. The carbines, of the Austrian Mannlicher system, invariably went the round to a chorus of delighted appreciation. Likewise our field-glasses, through which they would look for hours.

Shortly after leaving this village we had a fortunately short but exceedingly steep hill to climb, which brought us on to a magnificent plateau of rich green grass, carpeted with wild flowers. From this point onwards the scenery changed completely. We were in the Alpine regions. It was very beautiful, the trees covered every hill with a mass of green foliage, and every here and there a snow-capped mountain peak would appear. Not only was the scenery different, but the dwellings of the peasants took quite another style of architecture; conical thatched roofs of a height out of all proportion to the size of the house, and a massive verandah or loggia built into the house, The inhabitants are snowed up for many months every year, and have to lay in great stores of food. But how delightful it must be here in winter! What an opportunity for snow-shoeing! The peasants can do the journey to Podgorica in about half the time on their primitive snow-shoes.

The ride from here to Kolasin was nearly perfection. We skirted rushing mountain torrents, through woodland glades and soft green swards; the air was glorious and cool,

for though the sun was powerful there was an abundance of shade. One drawback, however, a drawback sufficient to mar our happiness, was not denied us. Every mile or so we had to plunge through a quagmire, equal to the worst South African mudhole, which is saying a great deal. Much care had to be exercised to prevent the horses getting fairly bogged or breaking their legs, but all passed without an accident, though our condition at the end of the day was awful. We were bespattered from head to foot.

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Several halts at hans were made during the day for rest, food, and milk, and about three p.m. we struck the River Tara, and had crossed the water-shed of the Adria and the Black Sea. We followed the Tara till Kolasin, where we arrived about seven o'clock.

Montenegrins have no idea of judging time and distance, which is curious. There is another favourite way of describing a distance: by cigar (cigarette) smoking. You will be informed that the distance is one cigarette, which means that the traveller has time to smoke one cigarette on the way. As an ordinary smoker consumes a cigarette in about ten minutes, the distance would seem small, but it is not so. It is better to reckon two hours. Quarters of hours and cigarette-smoking measurements take a lot of learning, and cause much vexation to the spirit before they are mastered. When the stranger has mastered them, he ceases to ask, and patiently waits. One word of warning to intending travellers. If you are told that the next village is *two* hours away, then rest awhile and eat and drink, for two hours means "X."

About seven p.m. we clattered up the little street of Kolasin, which is the capital of the same-named district.

It is a beautiful mountainous tract of country, as unlike to Montenegro proper as is the sun to the moon, richly wooded with dense primeval beech forests, full of rushing streams and rich pasturages. The little town itself is rather uninteresting; it has about 1,500 inhabitants, all Montenegrin, for the Turk has almost entirely disappeared. Only in a ruined mosque and one or two dilapidated Turkish houses is the traveller reminded that once the Unspeakable was master here. The houses are all built with the afore-mentioned high conical roof and of substantial aspect.

Our inn was a curiosity, and as we drew rein before it we noticed a crowd of men in the balcony of the first or top floor, for here the ground floor was devoted to stabling. Doctor S. hastily whispered that the Governor and General of Kolasin was one of the men upstairs. On going up the rickety stairs, we were at once introduced to him, and received most friendlily. He was a small wiry man, and reminded one strongly in appearance of Lord Roberts. Also, he spoke excellent German, having studied years ago in the Viennese Military Academy. Very kindly he promised to assist us during our stay in every way, and invited us to his house next morning.

We overlooked the Market Square and had real beds, though the only available room was tiny. Dr. S. and Stephan slept somewhere else. After the heat of the valley, we found the air very keen up here; Kolasin lies over 3,000 feet, and is the highest town of any size in Montenegro.

On the following morning we visited the Governor Martinovic formally in his house. It is only recently that he has ceased to be the Artillery General of Montenegro, a post which he held all through the Turkish war, taking part in all the important engagements.

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His ambition is to see the road connecting his district with Podgorica finished, which would bring the two towns within a six hours' drive of each other, instead of the present two days' very hard riding. The benefit to Kolasin is obvious. At present the vast beech forests, literally rotting, could be utilised, for wood is dear in the barren districts of Montenegro. Pyrite, too, is found in great quantities. In fact, Kolasin is cut off from the rest of the country. Everything must be painfully carried on horses or mules, and for a woman, other than a peasant, it is a journey of great difficulty. Side saddles are things unknown, and we heard of one lady, the wife of a foreign minister, who bravely undertook the journey, spending six days on the way from Podgorica. The Governor gave us a graphic description of the difficulties that he had experienced when he brought his family up here.

We also visited the local doctor, a most extraordinary individual with a crank. He had started a Montenegrin temperance society, called the "Band of Good Hope." At present, I believe, the three hundred odd members were all from Kolasin, and it was meeting with very little encouragement. The cultivation of plums for the manufacture of spirits is a staple industry, and these peasants wish to know what they shall do with their fruit. Besides, as the Montenegrins very rarely get drunk, it seems rather an unnecessary movement, and the Prince himself does not favour it.

Bismarck once said that England's greatness began to diminish when the "three-bottle man" died out; perhaps Prince Nicolas has like thoughts of his hardy subjects, who certainly can consume enormous quantities of alcohol with impunity. Besides, it would destroy a large source of the revenue, which Montenegro cannot afford to do. In the meantime the gallant three hundred feel very unhappy.

The few days that we spent in Kolasin were passed pleasantly in daily excursions into the surrounding country shooting, though with indifferent results. The Crown Prince Danilo's birthday came one day during our stay, and Governor, staff, and officials went to church attired in glorious raiment. They literally sparkle in gold lace embroidery, orders, and decorations, and for a gorgeous but absolutely tasteful effect commend me to the gala dress of the Montenegrin high official. It is the most artistic blending of gold, crimson, blue, and white.

After the service spirits were served out free on the market-place (what agonies must the three hundred have suffered!), and a dance was formed. The national dance—in this instance the "kolo"—is usually performed by men, though the women do sometimes join in, and it is a slow and stately measure.

[Illustration: THE KOLASIN MARKET PLACE]

[Illustration: THE KOLO]

The men place their hands on each other's shoulders and form a ring, which, however, is never completed. New men can join in, but a space is always left open. One step is taken sideways to the left, and then three to the right, and the movement is accompanied by singing. The singers are three or four men on the opposite horns of the circle, who alternately chant verses in honour of the Prince.

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The ring of men slowly danced their way from the Market Square to the Governor's house, where more spirits were given, and an accordion player joined the ring.

Loud cries of "Zivio!" followed the cessation of every movement. We followed and went in to the Governor, to offer our congratulations and drink His Royal Highness's health. The room was quite full, two or three men being rough peasants, relations of the Governor. There is very little class distinction in Montenegro. Often the humblest peasant can claim relationship with the Voivoda, or Duke, of the province, and will always be cordially received.

We felt quite ashamed of our appearance—leather coats, collarless shirts, and so forth—amongst such rich costumes. The complete outfit of a Montenegrin dandy costs over forty pounds, and takes a bit of beating.

Carefully tucking our rough riding-boots under our chairs, to avoid marking the contrast with our host's resplendent jack-boots of patent-leather, and buttoning up our coat collars, we endeavoured to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible in this brilliant assembly. But in spite of our tramp-like garb, we were always highly honoured guests.

CHAPTER XII

Montenegro's oldest building—The ride to the Moraca Monastery—A perilous bridge and ascent—The Abbot's tale—We inspect the monastery—The health of the King is drunk—The relative merits of Boers and Montenegrins—The Abbot makes us presents—We visit a peasant's house and a Homeric feast—A feu-de-joie—Departure from Kolasin—We are mistaken for doctors again—Raskrsnica.

In Montenegro there are, strangely enough, with one famous exception, no buildings of any great antiquity. This, however, can be easily accounted for by the repeated invasions of the Turks, who ravaged the land with a merciless fury. Montenegro was the only Balkan state which they were unable to bring to obedience, and the struggle, which began after the battle of Kossovo, has, perhaps, not reached its final stage yet, though other enemies have supplanted the Turk.

Far away in the heart of the mountains, and perched on the top of a high cliff, at whose feet the turbulent mountain torrent Moraca races past, there is situated a monastery, which takes its name from the river below.

This monastery is the only building that has escaped the scourge of the Turk, and, though often attacked, only once has it been partially burnt. Like its famous sister at Ostrog, it is constructed in a position where Nature has provided the best means of defence, and this the hand of man has skilfully utilised and improved. It was founded in

the year 1252 by one of the sons of the famous Servian king, Stephan Nemanja, and dedicated to S. Nicholas. Right well has the saint watched over and protected his feof.

During our stay at Ostrog the Archbishop of Montenegro impressed upon us most strongly the necessity of visiting Moraca before leaving the country. He himself had lived there many years as the Archimandrite, and was besieged by the Turks during his sojourn within its walls.

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So, accompanied by a guide, with whom the Governor of Kolasin had provided us, we made an early start one morning for the monastery. We had a perfect ride through dense beech forests, skirting a noisy little stream, of which we were able to obtain a glimpse every now and then through a break in the trees. On either side of the ravine the hills rose steeply to some height. We soon passed a lonely cross in a small clearing, erected to the memory of five Montenegrins who had been surprised and murdered there by the Turks.

It is always so in Montenegro, when the traveller is filled with a sense of peace at the grandeur of the wild mountainous scenery, or the beauty of a sylvan forest glade, a rough cross, or cairn of stones, will be pointed out where men have met a sudden and violent death.

[Illustration: A TYPICAL ROAD]

Once, as our path led up a steep incline, our guide told us graphically how that, a few weeks ago, both a horse and its rider had fallen down the one hundred feet into the river below. The path was very narrow, and he strongly advised us in passing to take care, which remark seemed slightly superfluous after the vivid description with which he had just favoured us.

Crossing the stream we dismounted, and climbed to a small grassy plateau on which a church is being built for the shepherds of the district. It commanded a beautiful view. The path now ascended to a great height, and much walking had to be done, for a ridge of hills lay between us and our destination. At the top the valley of the Moraca could be seen with a magnificent background of rugged mountains. A breakneck descent of two and a half hours, most of it on foot, brought us to the river, which was crossed by a picturesque and broken-down bridge. On a cliff opposite stood the monastery.

While leading my horse over the bridge I chanced to rest for a moment on the central arch to enjoy the view. The guide, who was behind me, thrust me unceremoniously forward. It is not always safe to admire scenery from Montenegrin bridges. Certainly, on inspecting the bridge from below, he seemed to have shown no unnecessary caution. Two of the arches had completely given, and may collapse at any moment.

A very steep and dangerous path leads up to the plateau on which the monastery is situated. It was nearly the cause of a serious accident to me, for my saddle gave, and began to slip backwards. Had the horse made one false step at this critical moment I should have been dashed over a precipice of eighty feet. Just before the gates stands a small inn, where we left our horses and proceeded on foot.

The monastery strongly resembles a fortress, for the massive walls surrounding it are liberally loop-holed, and it can be entered from one side only. We entered a large courtyard with buildings on all sides. At the back a great mountain ascends obliquely,

and in front an inaccessible precipice descends to the river. It was doubtless a tough morsel for the Turks in the olden days, though modern artillery would make very short work of it.

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The Archimandrite, or Abbot, soon came down and welcomed us most cordially, conducting us to his room, where we were regaled with the inevitable strong black coffee. He was a big, handsome man, with the long beard and hair which all the priests of the Greek Church wear. Quiet and benevolent as he looked, he is famed throughout the whole country as a mighty warrior; for in times of war the priests fight with the soldiers for their beloved freedom. Strangely enough, in the last war with Turkey he played an important role in saving the very monastery of which he is now the spiritual head. He was then a colonel, and commanded a battalion. The following story of the rout of the Turks is taken down from his own lips.

[Illustration: THE MORACA MONASTERY]

In those years (1876-7) all this district was in the hands of the Sultan, and the Turks had just made an unsuccessful attack upon the Monastery of Ostrog. Their army, under the command of the famous Mehmet Ali Pasha, was retreating on Kolasin, pursued by the Montenegrins. On reaching the Monastery of Moraca they halted with the intention of first destroying it, and Mehmet Ali placed a battery in a commanding position on the opposite heights for the bombardment.

Unknown to the Turks, half a battalion of Montenegrins were stationed there as garrison, and the Pasha, thinking that he had but a handful of priests to deal with, sent down a small detachment to effect an entrance. The gate was opened, and they were enticed inside. Hardly had the last man set his foot within the courtyard when the Montenegrins fell upon them and beheaded them every one.

The Turks, deeming all safe, sent a second detachment to assist in bringing out the booty, and they met with a similar fate. Then Mehmet began to suspect that something was wrong, and made preparations for a bombardment; but it was too late. A brigade of pursuing Montenegrins had come up. They fell upon him from flank and rear, and a horrid slaughter ensued.

It must be confessed that the account seems incredible, and is, doubtless innocently enough, greatly exaggerated. But the worthy Abbot distinctly stated that out of 25,000 Turks only 2,000 or 3,000 escaped. It was indeed “a terrible tale of a Turk that is ghastly and grim and gory.” The Montenegrins were but men 1,800 strong, just three battalions, one of which was commanded by Michael Dozic, the Abbot, and his battalion it was that took the Turks in the rear, throwing them into utter confusion.

To-day the peasants still find heaps of bones in the crevices and hollows of the rocks.

After this very pleasant story, we descended into the courtyard, which is formed in a semicircle. In the centre stands the church. It is built in the shape of a cross, and its porch and interior are gorgeously adorned with the most quaint frescoes; indeed, every particle of the walls and ceiling is covered with frescoes of the most crude design and

vivid colouring, and the altar-screen is magnificently gilded. The colours are well preserved, and seem as fresh as when the monks first laid them on, for the painting all dates back to the time of the foundation.

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It was somewhat horrifying to find that the frescoes behind the altar-screen were completely scribbled over. At first we put this down to impious tourists who delight in leaving their miserable names on the most historical buildings; but, on closer inspection, we found that they were copious notes in the form of a diary. The Abbot told us that Mitrofan Ban, the Archbishop, had written them during his lengthy abbacy many years ago.

There is another church, or rather tiny chapel, within the monastery which is about a century older than the rest of the buildings, and the interior is likewise covered with frescoes of the same crude and vivid painting. They represent scenes from the life of S. Nicholas, and the chapel is only used once a year during the pilgrimage which takes place on the feast of their patron saint.

Every year large numbers of Montenegrins flock to the monastery to offer prayers and offerings. Just outside the walls stands a small cannon, with a Turkish inscription, which four Montenegrins carried away one night from Kolasin when that town was in Turkish hands. Not only the bravado of such a deed, but the athletic feat of carrying such a weighty object over that difficult country, are very characteristic of this people. It is fired annually during the feast of S. Nicholas.

The worthy Abbot was greatly annoyed to find that we had ordered food below, and still more when he heard that we were returning to Kolasin the same afternoon. He repeatedly urged us to spend a few days with him, but, enjoyable as the visit would have been, previous engagements forbade our acceptance.

A second priest waylaid us as we were leaving for our meal, and carried us off to his room, where more coffee was served. He had travelled much in Turkey and the Black Sea, and we had a very pleasant conversation, but, after a short time, the pangs of hunger forced us to excuse ourselves. Our humble meal, which we partook of in the best chamber (and only bedroom), was hardly over when the young priest again rejoined us, bringing with him an enormous bottle of wine. Very solemnly he filled our glasses, and proposed the health of His Majesty King Edward VII. Our surprise was so great that we almost forgot to drink. And then came many questions as to the progress of the Boer war, questions with which, by the way, we were often assailed by the more intelligent classes during our travels.

To quote an instance which happened to myself once in Cetinje. While waiting outside the monastery for the appearance of the Prince, who was attending divine service within, I entered into conversation with a gendarme. We spoke of many things, and to my surprise, for he was but an ignorant peasant, he inquired as to the progress of the war. He asked the nature of the country, on which subject I was luckily able to enlighten him. Parts of it are not at all unlike Montenegro. At this he pricked up his ears.

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“Thou hast been to the Transvaal?” he asked with increased interest. “Are the people brave like we are?”

“They are brave,” I said, “but not as ye are. They only shoot at long distances, and object very strongly to hand-to-hand fighting.”

The stalwart Montenegrin looked puzzled.

“Shooting is good,” he answered; and after a pause he added, “at *first*, but that is not fighting. It is an empty glory to shoot one’s enemy, if one cannot prove it afterwards.” I knew he was alluding to the decapitating process. “And then the wild charge, the cutting with the handjar when rifles are thrown away—*that* is fighting.”

I explained that our soldiers loved the bayonet as much as the Montenegrin loved the handjar.

“But what can you do when the other side won’t wait for it?” I asked.

“Then they are cowards,” he answered judicially. “Are thy countrymen all as big as thou art?” he continued thoughtfully, feeling my biceps and scrutinising me closely.

“Some of them are bigger,” I said.

“Then the Boers will have no chance,” he said emphatically, and at this moment the Prince emerged from the church. This personal allusion to my size I took as a great compliment, for in a land where physical strength is an all-important factor candid appreciation of this kind is not meted out to one and all alike.

Extremely fatigued after our early start and long ride, it was an effort to keep from falling asleep, and noticing this the priest left. We were both comfortably asleep in corners when the wretched landlord appeared with armfuls of sheets and pillows at the order of the priest. He cruelly woke us up and proceeded to make beds. After that all thought of sleep was gone. Furthermore, in dirty and dusty riding-clothes one has not the heart to lie down on spotlessly clean sheets.

Soon afterwards the horses were ready, and we cantered up to the monastery to take our leave. But leave-taking was no such easy matter. Our pockets were filled with dried fruits, and after we were already in the saddle the Abbot presented us with packets of incense which he hurriedly fetched from the church. Waving him and the other fathers a last farewell, we started on our long ride back to Kolasin.

During our rambles in Kolasin the doctor took us to a peasant’s house whom he knew very well. This acquaintance proved one of our most pleasant recollections of the country. The head of the house was a fine-looking man, lean and active, and possessed many decorations for past acts of bravery in the field. His son was in prison

at the time for some political offence, but his daughter-in-law and two little babies, besides two or three unmarried daughters and sons, were living with him. The whole family outdid themselves in courtesy to us, and we were, as usual, considerably embarrassed by the behaviour of the women-folk. Though we went several times to the house, they would rarely seat themselves while we were present, and invariably kissed our hands in coming and going.

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The doctor played games of cards with our host, but the united efforts of P. and myself failed to discover any method or system in the game. The doctor tried to explain at first, but after five minutes we begged him to desist. So we sat and looked on, drinking cups of black coffee and endeavouring to make friendly overtures to the babies, who openly showed that they considered us distinctly dangerous.

The house itself was curious. The ceiling was low and the walls were of great thickness. The windows were so small that it was barely possible to squeeze one's head through the opening. The idea of the house is to obtain the maximum amount of warmth, for the cold of these mountainous regions is intense in winter. In summer, however, these houses are delightfully cool.

The evening before our departure from Kolasin we were invited to an open-air feast at the peasant's country house.

The "country house" was, it is true, only a rough wooden shanty, but, as our meal was outside, it didn't matter.

When we arrived, after an hour's walk, we found a table set out with a white cloth and three wooden chairs on a green slope overlooking the valley of Kolasin. It was a delightful spot. Some little distance away the last few turns were being given to a lamb roasted whole on a spit over an open fire.

The feast was soon served up. The entire lamb, on a great wooden platter, an enormous bowl of milk, eggs, sheeps' cheese, and unlimited spirits. The women-folk waited on us and kept our platters full. Other men with their wives joined us, not to partake of this Homeric feast, but to see us gorge ourselves. It may not be a nice expression, but we were literally forced to eat to an uncomfortable state of repletion. They took no denial, and even then the lamb was not nearly finished. These mountaineers eat meat only on great festivals, and consume enough to last them for the next few months. They did not realise that we were content with sufficient to last us for the next few hours.

Our glasses, too, were kept replenished with the potent spirit of the land, and our respective healths were drunk, on the average, once every three minutes. When this began to pall they toasted each other, in which we had naturally to join, and these were followed by patriotic toasts. It was rather an uproarious evening.

About ten we took our leave, and our hosts drew their pocket cannons and started firing; we naturally replied, and a deafening fusillade went on till every man had emptied his revolver. With singing ears we returned to our hotel to find the town alarmed, excited groups were congregated in the Market Square. Our *feu-de-joie* was speedily explained, and the men flocked into the inn. As a slight return for the fright we had given them, we paid for a few quarts of spirits. The Governor overlooked our law-

breaking, for after dark firing is not allowed, and no doubt he envied us in his heart, for, poor man, he is in the clutches of the Band of Good Hope, much, we heard, to his disgust.

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We left next day, and had a hearty send-off from the town, who turned out *en masse* to witness our departure. The local doctor was not present. We had found no favour in his eyes.

Shortly after leaving the town we passed the Montenegrin Militia, hard at their weekly drill. No uniform is worn, every man coming in his everyday clothes, bringing only his rifle. But they drill very well and the discipline is excellent. A company was being dismissed as we came up, and a large number accompanied us for a long way.

The ride was magnificent that afternoon. The way wound up and up, and our last glimpse of Kolasin showed us the little town far away below us.

The usual Montenegrin trick was again played successfully on us, the “only two hours’ ride” developing into a journey of six hours. But to-day we did not murmur; it is only at the end of a long and trying day that this style of humour is out of place.

For two hours our path threaded its way through dense beech forests. At one spot P. and I had ridden on so far in advance of the others that we dismounted and waited for them to come up. In the interval I was assailed by a man with a bandaged head. Doctors always wear European clothes in Montenegro, and without further inquiry, this man proceeded to sit down before me and remove his bandages, disclosing ultimately a ghastly eye.

“What must I do for it, Gospodin Doctor?” he asked at length, for beyond the usual greeting he had not spoken. One glance was sufficient, and P. got up and left us.

“Take it away!” I said, with averted face. “I am not a doctor, and never shall be.”

I felt him looking at me with his uninjured eye. These simple peasants are always under the impression that our modern education comprises that of medicine.

“But, Gospodin, it has been like this for weeks,” he went on, “and is very painful.”

“There is a doctor at Kolasin. Go to him. *He* will be pleased.”

Evidently much hurt at my indifference, he slowly replaced his bandages and departed. Then our party caught us up, and we continued our way.

Later on we emerged from the woods, and, still climbing, we rode for the remaining distance on magnificent grassy slopes far above the forest belt. Several snow-patches still lay unmelted in the shady hollows, and often far below us. From this ridge we obtained our first good view of the lofty Kom, the second highest mountain in Montenegro, and our ultimate destination.

These great downs, across which we rode, had been only thrown open to the public, so to say, a few days ago, and were full of flocks of sheep and goats and large herds of cattle, grazing to their hearts' content after their long winter's imprisonment in the villages below. The Government fix the date when the shepherds may migrate into the mountain pasturages and when they must leave again for the lowlands.

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We overtook or met several parties of Montenegrins, and even Turks, for the border is not far distant, travelling from place to place. We were viewed with obvious interest, and invariably greeted with respect, though there is nothing of subservience in a Montenegrin's salute. He feels himself in no way your inferior as a man until you have proved your superiority in shooting or physical strength.

In this part of the country Dr. S. always told the peasants that we were engineers, as a road is being contemplated.

About seven p.m. we branched off from the main path, and descended on foot a steep path into a thickly wooded valley. In a clearing of the trees stood a collection of wooden huts, a summer village of shepherds, called Raskrsnica.

It was our halting-place, and as our visit had been notified, we were received by a schoolmaster and taken to his hut, which was placed at our disposal.

No schools are held during the summer months, and the teachers often turn shepherds, as in this case, and migrate with their flocks to the mountains.

CHAPTER XIII

A typical mountain hut—Costume of the north-eastern borderers—Supper and a song—We go out hunting, and cause excitement—The Feast of Honour—We ride to Andrijevica—Andrijevica and our inn—The Voivoda—We go to church—Turkish visitors—Alarums.

[Illustration: OUR HUT AT RASKRSNICA]

It was nearly dark by the time that we were unloaded and had got our traps into our hut. As half our time was spent in similar constructions during our mountain tour, it may be as well to describe them now.

They are usually built entirely of wood, rough, irregularly hewn planks, and no attempt is made to make them air-tight; often great crevices gape, through which a hand can be put. The roof is generally fairly water-tight. A man *can* stand up-right in the middle, but the roof slopes steeply down to the sides. The word "can" is used advisedly, *i.e.* if one is able to breathe the densely smoky atmosphere at the top. Chimneys or outlets in the roof to permit the smoke to escape are unknown, and when cooking is going on, or at night when a roaring fire is kept burning, the appearance of the hut from outside gives a stranger the impression that it is on fire, and that the flames must burst out at any moment. It leaks smoke at every crevice.

Inside is an open space reserved for the wood fire, and a primitive arrangement, often a chain suspended from the roof, for hanging the cooking pot. A few blocks of wood serve

as easy-chairs, beds there are none, an armful of rushes or grass, which is usually damp, serving their purpose. On entering, the new-comer will first cough violently, then choke, and finally make a hurried exit to the fresh air. Summoning courage and with a fresh supply of oxygen, he dashes into the hut again, and throws himself on his heap of rushes. As the smoke rises, the atmosphere on the ground is less dense, but the penetrating smell of the burning wood is sufficiently strong to make his eyes pour with water. These are first impressions; later on, he can even sit up, and after a few days will be able to walk comparatively slowly in and out of the hut.

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Usually at the back is a small partition, behind which a rough shelf can be found, laden with the day's milking and cheese. The whole family sleep in the hut, no division separating the men from the women. But the Montenegrin peasant sleeps in his clothes, so privacy is considered unnecessary.

Dr. S. was here officially to inspect the flocks, and had an appointment with the district captain. He was not there, and shortly after our arrival a man turned up, delivering a message from the captain, somewhat in the following fashion.

"Sir, it is my privilege to be the bearer of the captain's message. The captain would have you know that he will do himself the honour to meet you here to-morrow in the early morning."

The man stood smartly at the attention and saluted at the conclusion.

It is extraordinary the grandiloquent language which even the most humble peasant will use, and he speaks with the polished ease of a gentleman.

The baggy blue breeches and red jackets are not worn in these regions, and are replaced by white woollen tight-fitting trousers and jackets, bordered with black braid. In fact, the dress strongly resembles that worn by the Albanians, except that the black braid is narrower and less elaborate, and the national cap of Montenegro is carried instead of the white head-cloth or fez. The costume is national, and has not been altered to that of the Montenegrin proper, because it is considered warmer. The first time that Prince Nicolas visited his new subjects a man said to him in that characteristically familiar way in which the Prince's subjects are wont to address him:—

"Gospodar" ("Lord," and the universal form of address for the reigning Prince), "wilt thou not exchange thy blue breeches for our white trousers. They would suit thee better."

The answer of the Prince is not recorded.

Stephan called us into our shanty when the evening meal was ready. Our host wished to slaughter a lamb, but we deferred that till the morrow, and we ate what we had brought with us. It was, barring the smoke, a delightful experience, and its charm never diminished. That hour spent before turning in, after supper, when the tobacco tins circulate, and the shepherds crowd in from the neighbouring huts, made an impression which it will not be easy to forget.

The fire, with its dancing flames and uneven light, shows up the ring of men squatting round it. Everything beyond is shrouded in impenetrable gloom, throwing out the wild picturesque figures, with their bronzed and honest faces, in bold relief. The ruddy glare rounds off all hard corners and softens every inharmonious line, flashing fitfully here and

there on a steel revolver barrel. The musical voices rise and fall, and outside the stars are shining. All is peace and calm.

That first evening a young shepherd, strikingly handsome, with clean-cut features, went outside and sang a wild Albanian song in our honour, his weird chanting echoing in the mountains. Then came a crackling of pistol-shots from the near distance, a novel way of applause. With very happy feelings we rolled ourselves in our great coats and went to sleep.

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Next morning we rose at five, and had a delightful wash in a stream of icy-cold water. As usual, our ablutions caused much amusement. The mountaineer contents himself with a ladle of water poured into his hands. Very shortly afterwards the captain arrived. He insisted on going out shooting with us, as well as the schoolmaster. We plunged into the forest and were soon deep in the excitement of stalking.

P. was with the captain, and the schoolmaster and myself soon lost them. Later on, I too lost my companion, and it being near our advertised time for dining, I made my way back, which presented very little difficulty. On coming in view of the clearing I was received with shouts. Not being gifted with the Montenegrin skill at hearing and talking at great distances I walked on, and was ultimately able to distinguish the question as to where I had left P. I answered that I had not seen him for hours, and passed on to our hut.

The excitement seemed to wax, and Dr. S. speedily enlightened me as to the cause. Both the captain and the schoolmaster had returned, *i.e.* they had stood and talked from a hill about a mile away, saying that P. was lost.

“Well,” I said, “P. knows at what time we eat, and I have never known him to be late for a meal yet. And it is in an hour’s time.”

“But the woods are dangerous. There are bears. The Albanian frontier is not far away. He can lose himself for hours,” were among the remarks that I could hear.

“Considering that he has a magazine carbine and a revolver, I don’t think that we need be afraid. It is easy enough to find one’s way back, and P. will have the sense to watch the sun. He has been out alone before in his life,” I remarked, feeling rather irritated.

Then an old lady began abusing me for having deserted him, “and he so young, a mere child,” *etc*., until I fairly lost my temper.

“You must not take it amiss,” explained the doctor, who knew me. “It is only their love for you.”

“Thanks,” said I. “But that is enough. If that old lady doesn’t stop expressing her love for me shortly ——. Look here, doctor,” I continued, waxing wrath, “you stop her. You understand the more talkative sex better than I do. I’ll stop the men.”

About ten minutes before dinner P. turned up, serenely unconscious of the trouble, telling us how he had found a delightful shepherd, who had carried him off to his shanty and feasted him on bread and milk, but that he was still ravenously hungry. The incident did not close here either. When P. heard of the anxiety caused by his absence he took it as a personal insult to himself, and began abusing everyone in his turn. But

all the same, the people remained obdurate, and we were never left alone, though they let us ramble whither we wished.

Our dinner that day was a kind of feast of honour to the captain. The lamb was served, as usual, whole. Half a dozen men joined us besides our party. The doctor, P., and I had knives and forks and a plate apiece.

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“Help yourself to all you want at the beginning,” said the doctor kindly. “Take as much as you think you can possibly stow away.”

We were glad afterwards that we had followed the doctor’s advice, for when we had finished helping ourselves the men fell upon that lamb and rent it limb from limb with their horny hands. Montenegrins have not pretty table manners. Forks are superfluous, a hunting-knife will do for the bread, and spoons are only used for fluids, when they dip in the common bowl.

That evening we went out shooting in another direction, and were amply rewarded for an exceeding tiring climb, although deer were not abundant. In fact, the moment that the shepherds take possession of the mountains, game nearly always disappears, returning with the peace and solitariness of the autumn.

On the following day we left Raskrsnica at an early hour *en route* for Andrijevica, which lies at a considerably lower altitude than Kolasin. Consequently we had a lot of downhill work. We had another magnificent view of the Kom on our way, but otherwise our ride of about six hours was uneventful. Andrijevica is first seen from a great height, and really looks quite close.

“Half an hour,” said our guides, “will see us in the town.”

The descent was of a breakneck description, and had to be done on foot. The heat was tremendous, and, the way proving to be an hour and a half, our tempers suffered. It was about noon when we rode into the little town or village, for it is nothing more, though the capital of the Vasovic district, Montenegro’s most eastern and consequently most dangerous possession. It borders on Gusinje, the wildest and fiercest of Albania’s clans.

The office of the Governor, or Voivoda, to give him his proper Montenegrin title, corresponding to our word Duke, is therefore no sinecure. His position calls for more diplomacy and acumen than any other in the country. A false move, a thoughtless action or word could plunge the tribes of Northern Albania and Montenegro in a fierce warfare. But a few weeks after our departure, war very nearly did break out at Mokra, over a dispute as to the rights of a small grazing-ground, and was only averted at the last moment. Then Andrijevica was full of troops, for 25,000 Albanians stood fully armed on the border, and a pistol-shot would have started an invasion of Montenegro.

[Illustration: ANDRIJEVICA]

The little township is prettily situated on a slight eminence at the junction of the Lim and the Perusica, the former a tributary of the Danube. It has a population of five hundred clad in the white Albanian dress, and is celebrated, rightly or wrongly, for the beauty of

its women. Certainly our landlady was a pretty enough looking woman of most refined manners. The men are very fine-looking fellows. The country all round is magnificent.

Our inn was also the town bakery, and we had a nice large bedroom well stocked with flies, and real beds, though in daytime it was the dining and drawing-room combined.

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Really many of the inns we visited in Montenegro could be aptly described by the song sung in London a few years ago of a coster describing his home. He informed the audience that if they wanted to see his library, his kitchen, or his best spare bedroom, "You just stops where you is." In slightly more grammatical language, it could be well applied to these hostels.

Towards evening we were taken and presented to Voivoda Lakic Voivodic, who was sitting in semi-state before the house of a rival drinking-place.

He had a remarkably strong face, and was of powerful build. Speedily we were introduced to his adjutant, the town captain, and other officials, and a great circle was formed of which we were the centre of attraction. Our arms were brought out and examined with great glee and appreciation; also our field-glasses came in for their usual share of admiration, and our clothes were likewise carefully overhauled.

When we laughingly said that we hoped for some sport with the Albanians and perhaps to shoot a few, our popularity was complete; our backs were clapped, and a great scene of joy and enthusiasm took place. Such remarks are liable to be taken rather literally in this region.

We gave the Voivoda and his adjutant a dinner one evening, the best that we could manage, though it certainly was not the kind of feast to which one would ordinarily invite a Duke.

Being five of us, our table was not big enough, so we joined on a second smaller and lower table at which the doctor and P. sat. P. put a salt-cellar between the upper table and the lower, saying that as they now sat "below the salt," they could behave as they liked. It was a most uproarious meal, and later on the Voivoda retired to a bed which was just behind him to laugh himself out.

[Illustration: CHURCH PARADE]

On Sunday we went to church—at least we went *to* the church and met the Voivoda outside. It was a very hot day and the little edifice was crowded. We had a suspicion that the worthy Voivoda came late on purpose. He just glanced at the crowd which had overflowed into the open space before the door, and to the relief of his staff proposed a quiet cup of coffee instead. Under the shade of the trees, discreetly apart from the merrymakers who were celebrating the Mass of a departed comrade, we sat in the customary ring and were served with coffee. It was a pleasant hour, and as the Voivoda, who was a bit of a wit, if somewhat irreverent, said, "This is better than inside."

The church was about a quarter of a mile from the town and lay almost hid in a beautiful wood. The bells, as is often the case, were hung about a hundred yards away from the

church on a wood scaffolding, and on the green grass sat many groups of Montenegrins.

The occasion was a feast. Mass was being said for the soul of a man who had recently died, and it is the custom for the dead man's relations to give a feast to all comers. Large dishes of roast lamb were being handed round to the men who sat in circles, the women eating apart, and much spirit was drunk. About six priests were also present, feasting.

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We had altogether a very merry stay in Andrijevica, and the men of Vasovic are sturdy, honest, fearless, and excellent companions.

Once, as I was admiring an old pistol worn by a man who was visiting us—for men were continually dropping in on us at any hour, in a most unceremonious fashion—he promptly took it off and gave it to me. It had been carried thirty years by a priest, he told me, before it came into his possession, and had killed at least twenty men. Afterwards I gave him a present of six florins.

There are no police in Andrijevica, but the population take their turn to patrol the town at night with rifles. This is not to keep order amongst themselves, but as a guard against an eventual raid of Albanians. Crime is unknown in this mountain town.

One afternoon we were startled to see half a dozen Turkish officers ride into the town, accompanied by an escort of Turkish soldiers, all fully armed. They were proceeding to Gusinje, where fighting had been taking place and many men had been killed. It is very curious to observe the way that the Turkish and Montenegrin authorities visit each other, for the intricate formation of the border often necessitates the traversing of a small portion of the other's country. Owing to the danger, everyone goes fully armed. The greatest possible harmony reigns between the Turks and Montenegrins, as the formidable array of Turkish decorations which adorn the breasts of all Montenegrin border officials will testify. The Albanian is the only cause of trouble, and it is chiefly against him that the Albanian borders are garrisoned by Turkish troops.

In the above-mentioned border dispute, the Turks sent down a formidable army to assist the Montenegrins and prevent an incursion into a friendly state. Truly things have changed very much, for it was not so very many years ago that Albania held aloof when Turk and Montenegrin were fighting. Their sympathies, if for either side, were with the Montenegrins, and now the hated Turk throws himself into the balance for Montenegro.

No man goes any distance unarmed. A rifle is part and parcel of his being. So it is that visiting Albanians carry theirs too, and it is no uncommon sight to see eight or ten Gusinje men, conspicuous by their white head-cloths, rifles slung over their shoulders, and a girdle of cartridges, come into Andrijevica to market, or perhaps even to consult the Voivoda on a question of blood-guilt.

No one knows in these parts when an alarm will be given, either by trumpet-call or rapid magazine firing, and each man must be ever prepared to hurry to the appointed rendezvous at a moment's notice. If he be guarding his flock, eating at home, or carrying produce to the market, it is the same; his rifle must be ready to his hand and everything left standing to answer the call to arms. Life is very real on these turbulent borders, and a chance dispute may assemble a brigade of Montenegrins and a horde of Albanians, each ready to attack the other on the spot. The shepherd private knows where to find his section commander, the latter, on completion of his section, meets his

company officer, companies assemble, battalions form, and the brigade is ready within an hour or two.

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Such is the state of affairs to-day along the whole Albanian frontier, but nowhere to such a degree as in the provinces bordering on Gusinje.

CHAPTER XIV

The Voivoda's invitation—Concerning an episode on our ride to Velika—The fugitive from a blood-feud and his story—We arrive at Velika—The men of Velika—The menu—Border jurisdiction—A shooting-match—The Kom—Pleasant evenings—A young philosopher—Sunset.

One evening the Voivoda invited us to ride with him on an official visit to Velika, an offer which we eagerly accepted.

Velika is a narrow strip of Montenegrin territory lying practically in Albania, or rather Gusinje, for the men of Gusinje owe and give no allegiance. Velika is not cut off from Montenegro, but the mountain connecting it with, so to speak, the mainland is steep and almost inaccessible, besides entailing a long and weary detour of many hours. Therefore our path to-day would lead us across an intervening strip of Gusinje territory.

Next morning at an early hour saw us in our saddles, the Voivoda having first ascertained that our arms were in good order. "Not that there is any danger," he said. "But we never know if anything may happen, and it is well just to be prepared."

Besides the Voivoda, we were accompanied by his adjutant, a lieutenant in the standing army, who had studied in Italy, and an escort of about six men, armed with modern magazine rifles. Later on, this escort was materially increased.

About three hours' ride up the magnificent valley of the Lim brought us to a khan, and here we found another half-dozen men awaiting us, and another officer. These preparations seemed rather formidable for a journey of about an hour through a friendly country, but we knew already the uncertainty of the Albanian temper, and did not wonder.

As we led our horses across a rickety wooden bridge, the Voivoda called to us and said we were now about to enter Albania, and spoke of the temporary armed alliance between England and Montenegro, which remark seemed to please him greatly. A great cairn of stones marked the border, and the adjutant reined in his horse, for we were going to ride in single file, to tell us that it would be better to unsling our carbines. "It looked better," he said. Many Albanians could be seen working peacefully in their fields, and huts dotted the mountain-sides. It was a scene of agricultural peace, enhanced by magnificent scenery.

Suddenly, at some distance, two rifle-shots were distinctly heard, and the calm of the picture was as rudely and suddenly disturbed as if an earthquake had happened. The

peaceful peasants stooped, throwing away the spade, and in exchange each had a Martini rifle in his hand, which he rapidly loaded from the bandolier of cartridges round his waist. Men rushed out of the slumbering cottages, and a great shouting commenced.

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“It is nothing,” said the adjutant. “They become excited like this very often.”

But I noticed our escort closing in, and every man’s face wore a look of great interest. Still we rode on, just as if nothing unusual were happening.

To our left the hill ascended to a great height, and about one-third of the way up a belt of trees commenced, stretching to the top. Towards this wood ran hundreds of Albanians, and disappeared from view. I confess that I had a most uncomfortable feeling that I was being covered by many unseen rifles. We should have stood a poor chance had they begun firing at us, for there was practically no cover near.

But our pace, that of a smart walk, neither increased nor decreased, and it ill became me to show my innermost feelings to these fearless mountaineers who so evidently considered this sudden excitement a most everyday occurrence.

The noise of the shouting, however, continued, and was answered by men in all directions. It was a regular pandemonium of yelling fiends, for the Albanians are not beautiful to look upon.

Suddenly a man appeared from some bushes close to our little party and headed straight for us, running like a deer.

He had barely reached us and seized my stirrup leather, on which he hung, panting heavily, when from the woods emerged a pursuing crowd, brandishing their rifles as they ran. Within a few minutes we were surrounded by about a hundred and fifty Albanians, whose gestures were not to be misunderstood.

They wanted to kill the man at my stirrup, who looked beseechingly up to me for protection. Why he selected me I have no idea, and I did not relish the compliment at all. Our escort formed a meagre ring around us, and we were forced to halt.

“Are they going to shoot?” I asked the adjutant, who was next to me, in excusable excitement, “because if so, I would like to dismount.”

It was not a pleasant feeling, perched up on a horse within fifty yards of reputed good marksmen.

“Oh no,” answered the officer, “they only want the man, not you.”

“Still, you are not going to hand back the man, are you?” I asked in Italian.

“We must hear what the Voivoda says,” said the adjutant, shrugging his shoulders.

I looked at the man, while an excited conversation was carried on by our party and the Albanians, and found him a pleasant-looking young man; his breath was coming in great gasps from his heaving breast, but otherwise he showed no traces of excitement.

“Save me,” he said in broken Serb. “They fired at me as I was working in my field. I am blood-guilty.”

All this time his pursuers were evidently debating if our lives must be sacrificed as well, for to shoot the man meant killing some of us at any rate.

At this juncture several Albanians came to us and ranged themselves on our side, and amidst still greater excitement we began again moving forward.

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“It is all right,” laughed the adjutant, who throughout preserved the same air of utter indifference. “They daren’t shoot, the cowards, and we shall take him to Velika with us, and then decide what to do with him.”

“You don’t seem to mind this sort of thing much,” I said, “but for a beginner like myself it appears rather nervous work.”

“Oh no,” he answered. “I live here, and have been in many border fights. They always make a noise like that, and they very seldom shoot at big people.”

“But if they do?” I queried.

“Oh, well, we must all die once,” he laughed.

In another half-hour we passed the second landmark, and were informed we were again in Montenegrin territory. Our friendly Albanians left us, and rifles were more carelessly carried.

“What hast thou done?” I asked the fugitive at my stirrup. “Tell me thy story.”

“I am a doomed man; my days are numbered,” he said, smiling, and rolling a cigarette. “But life is sweet, and I wish to live a little longer.”

Strange, this man who was at death’s door barely an hour ago, was smiling and smoking happily as he walked by my side. He had a most fascinating smile and laughing eyes, and now that the immediate danger was over he had forgotten it.

“Some months ago in my village, many hours from here, a woman fell in love with me,” he said. “She was beautiful and I loved her too, but not so much as she loved me, for I feared her. She hated her husband, who beat her. One evening she came to me when her husband was away and told me that she loved me and that we would fly together. ’I love thee as I hate my husband, and see, if thou wilt not do this, I will break my spinning-wheel before thee.’ And I trembled, for now I knew that my life was doomed. For should I not take her, she must kill me as sure as there is a God in heaven, and if I fled with her, her husband and his relations would surely track me down. And she was very beautiful, and we must all die. So we fled here that same night. What could I do?” he asked, smiling again.

[Illustration: VELIKA]

“But why stay here?” I asked.

“Because,” he answered, “my brothers live here and I must stay here till I die. If I am not to be found, then my brothers must die for me. It will not last long, for there are many bags of money on my head. My enemy is a rich man.”

“But,” he went on, “wilt thou ask the Voivoda, who is a good man, to give me a magazine rifle and some cartridges? See my rifle, it is old, and I have but five cartridges left. For thee he will do it, and so I can die fighting a good fight, and perhaps can kill two or three of my enemies first. To-day I have wounded one.”

“I will ask the Voivoda,” I replied, “though I doubt if I have any influence with him. Ask him thyself.”

I did ask the Voivoda, but he said the thing was impossible. He had no rifles to give away. But our fugitive continued his request at intervals for the rest of the time that he was with us.

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At Velika, a collection of half a dozen houses, very charmingly situated in a valley, we halted and rested for many hours while the Voivoda transacted business and received reports from a very young officer who held this dangerous command. We commented on his youth, and were told that his father, recently dead, had held the position, and that he had inherited it. “Besides,” continued our informant, “he is quite up to his work.”

As we dismounted, our escort unloaded their rifles, the snapping of locks and breeches bringing the excitement of the last hour or two vividly back to our memory.

The men of Velika were fierce-looking and of great stature. Rifle, handjar, and revolver were carried by all. Our escort were equally fine men, that fearless look so characteristic of the Montenegrin race, being accentuated here. Yet the faces are pleasing, honest, and good-tempered. There is to be found in the world no more splendid specimens of fighting humanity than the Montenegrin borderer. Brave, reckless to a fault, with absolutely no fear of death, inured to every hardship, and able to live and thrive on the barest fare, they are typical of the old Viking, chivalrous and courteous, with the purest blood of the Balkans flowing in their veins.

Our meal was sumptuous. Fish shot in the river by one of our escort on the way, a bowl of ground maize cooked in oil, raw ham, eggs, bread, cheese and onions, the whole washed down in draughts of fiery spirits. Not a feast, I grant you, in an epicurean sense, but highly acceptable in Montenegro. We were waited upon by two women, who were always most careful to leave the room backwards. Our meal was very jolly, and at its conclusion we took corners in the room and slept. About three p.m. we started again for home, taking the fugitive with us.

He had decided to return to his farm, but as we neared the Gusinje strip of land where he lived the extreme nervous tension of the morning returned to him. Poor devil, it would be difficult to forget the sharp sighs which burst from him, when his control over himself left him for a moment, but it was with a smile and a cigarette between his lips that he left us, bounding over the ground like a deer.

In all probability he is dead by now.

In Gusinje we made a lengthy halt, while the Voivoda settled several boundary disputes between the inhabitants, our escort taking up commanding positions all round us and keeping a very sharp look-out.

It would seem that the Voivoda has right of jurisdiction in this strip of land, though how we were unable to elicit. At any rate Albanians came and stated their cases, bringing witnesses, and amongst great noise the Voivoda gave his judgments, which seemed to be final.

On re-entering Montenegro we dismounted on the bank of the River Lim; the Voivoda pointed out a stone on the opposite side about three hundred yards distance, and taking a rifle he fired at it. In a few seconds we were all shooting at it in turn, the Voivoda acting as umpire with the aid of my field-glasses. It seemed a risky thing to do in a country so easily alarmed, but no rapid firing was allowed.

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The shooting was moderately good.

As the last shot had been fired, and some of us already mounted, a corporal from Andrijevica came up at a trot, bringing a telegram for the adjutant. It contained the notification of his promotion to a captain.

This led to a salvo of revolver-shots and cheers, and we proceeded on our way.

At the first khan (Morina) we stopped for coffee, and found two or three hundred men assembled under the command of the district captain. Had anything happened to us, revenge would have come very quickly. Here our additional escort left us, and our long ride home was commenced, which ended in the dark.

It was a nasty ride, for both P. and Stephan's horses came down repeatedly, and the path was constantly about two hundred feet above the Lim. It requires care in the daytime, but in the uncertain light of evening it was distinctly dangerous. Both horses were done up, and Stephan lost his temper, and we saw him in his true colours, as he kicked and beat his unlucky animal. It was not till I took very energetic measures that he would stop, which amused the Voivoda immensely.

[Illustration: MORINA]

[Illustration: THE FUGITIVE OF VELIKA]

[Illustration: THE VASOJEVICKI KOM]

[Illustration: ALBANIANS AND MONTENEGRINS AT ANDRIJEVICA]

P.'s horse was ill—in fact, it was his last journey. A few days afterwards he died from inflammation of the lungs, contracted at Velika that day.

We went for a few days' shooting on the Vasojevicki Kom, and were handed over by the Voivoda to one called Vaso, a rich peasant of the district. He swore to be answerable for our safety, with his head and all that was his, and we lived with him for many days on the side of the mighty mountain.

The shooting was not good, however; it was not the season, but otherwise our stay was very pleasant. The grassy plateau was about five thousand feet high and bitterly cold at night; below us, on either side, stretched great beech forests, and the Kom rose abruptly before us.

Our hut was large and roomy, but draughty to an extreme. At night the icy wind whistled through its crevices, and we had to bury our heads in blankets. The whole family shared it with us, and in one corner stood an unwearied calf, too tender to brave the cold of the outside.

Those evenings which we spent round the fire are impossible to describe adequately. Tired from a long day's tramping and sliding through the forests, often wet to the skin from heavy showers, the peace and warmth of that camp fire were delightful.

The shepherds came from far and near, and asked us many questions: if we carried an apparatus for making banknotes (this is not meant as an insult, but a common belief that Europeans can fabricate their paper-money at will—a belief of which we had sadly to disillusionise them); if our glasses could show us Belgrade, and so on—questions sometimes so difficult to answer that we had to give them up. Then they would talk of themselves; the older men would tell of past deeds, of fighting and bloodshed, and the fitful glow of the fire would light up their animated faces and picturesque costumes.

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Great simple children they were, unknown in the art of lying, and yet they repeat stories of bygone battles and slaughter, which they have heard and believed, as gospel truth. Like Esau, with the smell of the field upon them, they love to listen, too, to stories of unknown lands, where the houses are even larger and finer than those of Cetinje or Podgorica, which towns many even have not seen; but too much of the outside world one cannot tell them, for then they look hurt at being deemed so childish. They are curious, too, as are all children, and love to examine the clothes which we strange foreign creatures wear. There they sit on the hard earthen floor, as happy and contented as princes, nay, more so, for they have no cares to trouble them. They proffer us their tobacco tins, accepting ours in return, touching their caps as they do so; then the cigarette, deftly rolled, is lit by a glowing ember, which they rake from the fire, and the now burning cigarette is handed to us to light from. Again we all touch our caps, for it is rigid etiquette, in accepting a light, to acknowledge the courtesy by a half military salute. In the corner the calf will moan, and we, now half asleep, will stretch out our weary limbs, draw our coats and blankets over us, and to the murmur of the now subdued conversation, find forgetfulness in sweet sleep.

I remember a conversation with a boy of about fifteen, who was out shooting with me, and acting as my guide and beater.

It was nearing sunset, and we sat and rested on a ridge which overlooked both sides of the valleys.

He asked me so many questions that I asked him if he had never even been to Podgorica.

“No,” he said, “I shall never go.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because I am content here. If I went to that great town, I should be ashamed of my ragged clothes. I should want to buy the beautiful things which they tell me are to be bought in the shops, and not having money I should be sad. No; it is better never to have seen such magnificence.”

“But,” I argued, “if thou goest to Podgorica, thou wouldst find work. Even I could get thee employment.”

“No,” he repeated; “my home is in the mountains. In time I would have to return here, and I should be miserable with the remembrance of those happy days.”

This boy had been taught at the school, and he told me the capitals of the great countries, which were nothing more than empty names to him. He knew, also, a few

words of German, about two phrases, though how he picked them up was hard to make out.

He liked to ask me questions about England, Montenegro's friend in past times of trouble, and seemed surprised to hear that I had seen snow before I came to his land.

His father said that the boy was stupid and a dreamer, but I thought differently of him.

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P. joined me, and together we watched the sunset. On our left towered the Kom, and running in an unbroken chain circled a mountain range, ending in the setting sun. Low down an angry bank of clouds hung over the distant peaks, and into this mass of black and grey the sun, in all its glory of yellow and gold, sank slowly. The hills between us seemed wild and mysterious. Away to our left, in gloomy confusion, the Albanian Alps reared their heads, lit here and there with a red gleam of sunlight. At our feet, shrouded in impenetrable blackness, lay two steep ravines. The sun sank, leaving a weird eerie feeling behind, and we found ourselves strangely cold.

We spent many days with Vaso, shooting with indifferent results, but revelling in the glories of nature.

CHAPTER XV

We leave Andrijevica—Our additional escort—The arrival at our camping-place—-In an enemy's country—The story of one Gjolic—Our slumbers are disturbed—-Sunrise on the Alps—We disappoint our escort—"Albanian or Montenegrin?"—A reconnaissance—The Forest of Vucipotok—The forbidden land—A narrow escape—We arrive at Rikavac—Rain damps our ardour—Nocturnal visitors.

We left Andrijevica finally one morning about eight a.m. for our many days' ride along the Albanian frontier to Podgorica. Everyone turned out to bid us farewell, from the Voivoda, who expressed his regret that we had seen no one shot, downwards. The Voivoda's son and a small party accompanied us to the outskirts of the town, where a quaint notice-board bears the inscription that, on pain of a fine, shooting is forbidden within the prescribed limits.

Here, after much hand-shaking and promises to come again, we mounted, and drawing our revolvers, replied right merrily to the farewell volleys of our friends. It is a pleasant custom that—shooting at parting.

[Illustration: THE RAVINE OF TERPETLIS]

We rode for two or three hours along the Perusica valley till we came to a small and scattered village, Konjuhe, where we dismounted for a rest. It was the birthplace of the Voivoda, and his brother still lived there. He was immediately sent for. When he heard of our proposed tour, he insisted on our taking an additional escort (besides Dr. S., and Stephan our servant, we had engaged another man, named Milan, in Andrijevica) of at least two men, as the country was just now in a very dangerous condition. The necessary guard was soon found, and after a long halt owing to a heavy shower, we were able to proceed on our way, first carefully loading our rifles and overhauling our revolvers. Our two men were quite celebrated for a famous raid into Gusinje, in which they had played an active part a short time ago. They had killed several Albanians, and

captured two hundred sheep. As the Albanians would shoot them at sight, they seemed hardly fitted to act as an escort; but then every man from that part is engaged, more or less, in a blood feud across the border.

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We commenced climbing almost directly, and the ascent lasted for the rest of the day. The scenery was grand. On our right the majestic Kom, still covered with snow; falling away precipitously to the left was the deep ravine of Terpetlis, through which a mountain torrent dashed; and rising high on the other side, and forming the boundary between Montenegro and Albania, was a magnificent rocky ridge. We dismounted at one point to breathe our horses, and made our midday meal off wild strawberries.

Further on we passed from the Vasovic into the Kuc. These two, the most warlike clans of Montenegro, were formerly under Turkish rule, and bitter foes. But when war broke out, they forgot their old enmity and joined hand-in-hand with Montenegro to drive out the still more hated Turk. Since then they have lived together in peace and harmony.

On nearing our camping-ground for the night, our two guards ran on to draw the fire from any concealed Albanians, while we followed more leisurely. The scenery was wild in the extreme, though differing very slightly from that which we had experienced during the last few weeks. Great woods stretched half-way down the mountain to the torrent, and up again on the further side. Immense boulders, with an occasional tree growing out of a crevice, and every here and there clumps of firs, every yard affording excellent cover for a hidden enemy.

Our destination was Carina, a collection of stone huts on an open green slope, which reaches up to the rocky sides of the Kom. It is the highest point inhabited in Montenegro by the shepherds in the summer, and lies over five thousand feet above the sea-level. During this period of the annual migration to the hills, the district is comparatively safe. The Albanians do not attack large parties, but rather stragglers, as larger numbers have an unpleasant habit of organising themselves into avenging bands to repay the visit with interest.

Not a soul was to be seen anywhere, not a living being of any description. In a shower of pelting rain we took possession of the largest hut. It is decidedly annoying to get thoroughly wet at the end of a long day, and the prospect of a night in damp clothes was in no way pleasing. The hut was damp and cold, and it had the chilly feeling which only comes from a long period of emptiness, and strikes to the marrow. But our men turned to with a will, cleaning out the hut, strewing it with very wet rushes, and piling up a big log-fire in the middle. We were pretty hungry, too, a couple of eggs at six a.m. and a few strawberries at midday are not much to go on, and we had been in the saddle for over ten hours. Stephan had brought amongst other things some raw bacon, which he gave me, but, hungry as I was, I could not face that. Later on, a happy thought struck me, and I went and toasted it over the fire. I do not recollect ever relishing food so much in my life. About a couple of hours later a lamb had been roasted, and we were able to make a decent meal.

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It was getting rapidly dark now, and watch had to be kept outside. The horses were picketed close at hand for fear of wolves, as well as Albanians. By the time that we had finished eating, night was upon us. It was pitch dark and no moon. Rather reluctantly I turned out to do my share of sentry-go in the bitter cold. But it was decidedly interesting, as one of our party began to tell stories of the usual blood-curdling nature. On emerging from the hut, I thoughtlessly remained standing for a few seconds in the low doorway which, as the fire was blazing brightly inside, showed up my figure strongly against the surrounding gloom. Before I knew where I was I was roughly seized by a man and thrown forcibly into the darkness. He intimated that I must be a fool to court death in that manner. For all we knew, he said, a dozen Albanians might be hiding around us and waiting for such an easy shot. And when I was not allowed to smoke, I realised that we were in an enemy's country.

Watch was kept all night by two men, one sitting on the roof, or on an elevation which commanded it, and the other patrolling round with a sharp eye on the horses. The roof must always be watched, for the Albanians usually creep up and climb on to it—it is always conveniently low—they then remove a board and shoot the sleeping inmates.

During my watch I was told the following story, which brings out many interesting traits of the Montenegrin character.

A certain man named Gjolic, of the tribe of Vasovic, killed two men of his clan over a love affair, and promptly fled to Gusinje, the country just opposite Carina, and inhabited by a tribe of Albanians, famed for their blood-thirstiness and hatred of strangers. The only passport to their land is crime, and no one but a fugitive from justice can hope to enter, or leave it, alive. Gjolic swore to have revenge on his clan, and in this respect he was a notable exception. He came repeatedly across the border, often in broad daylight, shooting anyone whom he met. He soon became the terror of the whole Vasovic. In the neighbourhood of Carina he had shot many shepherds, and last autumn he murdered a youth of sixteen. This was too much, and two men laid their heads together. To obtain the necessary right of entrance to Gusinje, they crossed over into Turkey and deliberately stole a cow, taking care at the same time that they should be arrested and sentenced to punishment. Their plan acted admirably, and they effected their escape, fleeing to Gusinje, where they were received in a friendly manner. But Gjolic was away, and for six months they waited for him in patience. At last news came that he was on his way home, and could be expected on a certain day. So the men went out to meet him, and began shooting fish in a river where he must pass. Fish shooting is a common and favourite sport of the people.

"God help you," said a voice, "has your luck been good?"

It was Gjolic who spoke.

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“Our luck is good,” they answered, and following an imaginary fish with their rifles, they turned on him.

Crack! Crack! Gjolic was dead.

That scene I shall never forget. The starless night, all round the land lying enshrouded in impenetrable darkness, the low voice of the Montenegrin which rose with his excitement, but sank again immediately to a hoarse whisper, and on the barely discernible roof of the hut a black figure, with rifle at the ready, sitting motionless.

It was eleven o’clock when I turned in, and the next man took his rifle and went outside to relieve one of the watchers. A roaring fire was kept going, for it was very cold, and round it lay the others sleeping, each with his rifle and revolver by his head. “And we are in Europe!” I said to myself, as I lay down to sleep, which, in spite of the mighty snoring of Dr. S., came almost immediately.

It seemed but a few minutes since I had closed my eyes when a shot rang out, bringing me to my knees in an instant. It is not advisable to rise quickly in these huts without taking the roof into consideration, as I had learnt by bitter and repeated experience. Everyone awoke, except Dr. S., who snored on peacefully. However, I roughly awoke him, and we all dashed out, rifle in hand.

One of our sentries stood peering into the gloom, and swore that he had seen a figure moving. We lay down and waited, but nothing came.

Then slowly the day began to dawn, and with it our anxiety diminished. I went to get a cup of coffee, preparatory to climbing a part of the Kom. One of our guards, of course, accompanied me. That is the worst of these districts, we could never move a step without being followed. It was like being under police surveillance. Furthermore, I should have preferred to climb with a good stick; but no. Again that iron control ordered me to take my carbine, and loaded too.

We reached a high ridge just in time to see the sun rise, and it lit up the snow-clad mountain-tops with an indescribable beauty. But so much has been written about the splendours of Alpine sunrises that it is needless to say more about it. Yet it was as beautiful as anything to be seen in Switzerland or the Tyrol. The ridge commanded a view in both directions. The Albanian Alps and the mountains behind the Moraca lay before us in one vast panorama, the latter looming up so close that it was difficult to believe that so many days’ hard riding lay between us.

After climbing one of the lower peaks, we descended again to our hut, which we reached shortly after six. Everyone was busy, washing, packing up, or even sleeping, which is an equally important business. To snatch half an hour’s sleep here and there is

an enviable art, and cannot be overrated. But, perched on a low stone wall, sat a guard all the time. Daylight does not imply safety.

After breakfast, luxurious with toasted bacon, I emerged from the hut to find an excited group outside, one of whom was even lying down and aiming.

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“He is watching us. It is far better that we should finish him now than allow him to go on and report our movements,” said the man, fingering his trigger lovingly.

On looking I saw an Albanian about six hundred yards away, half hidden behind a boulder. The idea of shooting a man in this way did not seem quite sporting, and Dr. S. agreed with me. The men were extremely disappointed at our refusal to allow them to shoot. “He will follow us till we reach the wood,” they said, “and then we shall repent it.” The Albanian shortly afterwards disappeared, and we proceeded with our packing.

About eight o’clock we left Carina, and had rather an unique experience in riding across several large snow fields which were quite hard, though the horses decidedly disliked the experiment. About an hour’s ride brought us to a tiny church, solidly built of stone and standing on a ridge overlooking the whole country. It is used by the shepherds who migrate annually to the pasturages in this district. Only a few months ago the Albanians had broken into it and utterly dismantled it. On the iron door and on the shutters huge dents and even bullet splashes were plainly visible. Our Albanian we found here awaiting us, which was a plucky thing to do. Our guards hailed him with the cry of “Albanian or Montenegrin?” But he answered, “Friend.” I think that our men showed him our rifles rather ostentatiously, and, as we were all armed with magazines and had plenty of ammunition, he must have thought that we should scarcely afford the desired sport. We did not see him again, though he took the same path which we were going to take. This incident put us very much on our guard, and we made preparations for the further journey with mixed feelings. Before us lay the dense wood of Vucipotok, which is the most ill-famed spot in Montenegro. It stretches unbrokenly down to Gusinje, and the bridle path which traverses it is the border line between the two countries.

It was then settled that a guard and myself should climb a small hill overlooking the wood and its approach. However, we saw nothing, and soon rejoined our party. Before entering the wood, in the open, were two or three stones erected to murdered men—it is customary in Montenegro to put up either a pile of stones or a slab of rock where the body has been found. Inscriptions on the stones are very rare, the Vucipotok is too dangerous to waste much time in it, but wherever these stones are seen, a dead man, as often as not headless, has been found. Such memorial stones are to be found all over the country, but not in such plentiful profusion as we saw them now.

Everyone dismounted, and with rather uncanny feelings we entered the forest. First of all went one of our escort, and then in single file, about ten paces apart, we followed. Rifles were held at the ready, and every boulder and tree carefully scanned. The path was atrocious, strewn with great stones, so that walking was no easy matter. When a particularly large boulder was reached, we would halt under its shelter to enable the horses to come up—they were following behind under the charge of one man. We did not exactly stroll through that wood.

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Every few paces stood a memorial stone. There was one put up to the memory of ten Montenegrins who were all shot down without seeing their enemy. Everyone shoots at sight here, and had we met our Albanian friend of the early morning, matters would have gone sadly with him. At one point I insisted on taking a photograph—much to everyone's disgust. The spot was where a famous Kuc general had been murdered. His head was taken in triumph to Scutari. Oddly enough, we ate our midday meal at his grave, for his friends took his body away from here and buried it in an open place directly overlooking the valley of Gusinje. I was rather hurried over the operation, as the Montenegrins distinctly objected to standing still, but they were all very tickled about it.

[Illustration: THE PATH THROUGH THE VUCIPOTOK]

The Vucipotok is used by young Montenegrins as a means of showing their bravery. They go straight through it alone, with their rifles over their backs, smoking cigarettes. This constitutes an act of reckless daring in their eyes. Some even go through, at some distance from the path, on the Albanian side. We met one young man leading his horse and strolling along as unconcernedly as though he were in Cetinje—so that we almost felt that we were being unduly impressed with a sense of danger. But afterwards we met another party who were proceeding with greater caution than we were. And then there were those memorial stones.

At last the wood ceased, and in a clearing we made a halt. Our Montenegrins looked relieved. For themselves they have no fear, but had one of us been hit, the disgrace for them would have been unspeakable. It would have necessitated a raid into Albania of the most extensive kind, and hundreds might have fallen; the Montenegrins guard their visitors as they guard their honour, and in that case, life is only a secondary matter.

We now climbed a very steep hill. At the top we had to dismount, as a narrow path, just wide enough for a horse, skirted along a great precipice, looking straight down about one thousand feet. It was a wonderful view, but not to be recommended to those suffering in any way from giddiness.

We overlooked the great Vucipotok wood through which we had just passed, and the whole valley of Gusinje. When we reached a place where we were able to turn round with comfort, we stopped for the view. A long, narrow valley, inclosed by the Procletia or "Damnable Mountains," through which a river could be seen flowing, lay at our feet. This was Gusinje, the forbidden land. With the aid of field-glasses the town of Gusinje itself could be just distinguished, a square and apparently walled-in town.[4] Very picturesque it looked in the bright sunshine, the great green woods in the foreground, the solemn and majestic snow mountains and the peaceful valley. Yet it is inhabited by the most villainous and treacherous cut-throats in Europe, an absolutely untameable tribe, who would die to the last man to preserve their independence.

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[Footnote 4: This, however, is not the case, as we afterwards learnt.]

When the path broadened out slightly our two guards left us and returned home. Both emptied their magazines into the air at parting, which we answered, and the din was tremendous. Below us was a small village or collection of shepherds' huts, and, in that moment, confusion reigned supreme. The men seized their rifles, the women rushed into the huts, dogs barked, and horses stampeded. It seemed rather thoughtless to thus alarm the village, but, on being remonstrated with, the men only laughed and fired another shot. Had it been a town below us the result might have been more serious.

A little further on, we stopped for rest and food at a narrow pass overlooking Gusinje on the one side and Montenegro on the other. The murdered Kuc general, whose memorial stone we had seen earlier in the day, was buried here. Strange that his body should find its last resting-place overlooking the home of his murderers.

By using the Montenegrin telephone (the art of talking at great distances), we ordered some milk from the village below, and drank it with that enjoyment which is only known to a thoroughly hungry and thirsty man.

Our afternoon's ride was again particularly stiff. Climbing one hill, Dr. S., who was leading, missed the path, a very easy thing to do, so undefined as it sometimes is. He got on to a very steep and rocky bit of the hill and his horse lost its footing. It began stumbling and slipping about in a most alarming manner. We held our breath for the next few seconds, for a long fall was in store for him, and certain death. He tried to dismount, and succeeded in getting off his horse, but his foot stuck in the stirrup, the horse still sliding on. Fortunately, the animal recovered its balance, and Dr. S. extricated himself, but it was a nasty moment. That is the worst of the Montenegrins; they rely so implicitly on the sure-footedness of their ponies that they ride up anywhere, only condescending to dismount for very steep descents. And accidents often happen when horse or man, or even both, are killed; but this presumable laziness affords no example to others.

About five p.m. we began anxiously inquiring the whereabouts of our night quarters. The usual Montenegrin *quart d'heure* was given—and rightly enough. A sharp descent, lasting over an hour, made painfully on foot, saw us in a great hollow basin among the mountains, with the pretty lake of Rikavac at the further end and a small collection of wooden huts.

To these we proceeded and were met by the village Fathers. Dr. S. was well known here and they had recognised him coming down. Five dear old boys they were, who kissed Dr. S. most affectionately, one unshaven old ruffian including me in his salute. I do not appreciate the Montenegrin custom of kissing among men; it is not pleasant. An empty hut was immediately put at our disposal. It was the most

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primitive and tumble-down habitation that we had had as yet. Of course it rained. It was almost the first rain on the trip, and we had to lie up here a whole day as P. was unwell and unable to ride. Everyone turned out to make the hut comfortable, but it was not a success. I lay down outside and promptly fell asleep, when a sharp thunderstorm came on and drove me inside. There was not a dry corner to be found. The rain came through in steady rivulets everywhere. There was no getting away from those persistent little streams, either head, body, or feet had to suffer—and the fire refused to burn. Added to that, the whole population crowded in to look at us. It was no fun at all Stephan stood cursing in German that he could not get near the fire to cook, and that he would not cook at all if the mob were not cleared out. This Dr. S. refused to allow, as it would be considered inhospitable.

In course of time the rain stopped and our visitors left us, but only temporarily. Stephan cooked and we went outside to dry ourselves. The food was then ready, and after putting away a good meal we were able to view the world with more equanimity.

After supper it came on to rain again and damped us thoroughly before going to bed. I was very annoyed to find, after having discovered as I fondly imagined a dry corner, that one of my pockets was full of water. I should not have been so irritated had my tobacco been in another pocket; it was a leather coat and held the water beautifully. Then we tried to go to sleep. My pillow was a stone, like Jacob's, and though I tried covering it with my coat it was of no avail, since the cold forced me to put it on again. I do not mind a hard bed, but a hard pillow is distinctly objectionable. We were just on the point of sleeping when in stalked two men for an after-supper smoke and chat, and one of them, to P.'s intense disgust, sat on his feet. It cost Dr. S. all his diplomacy to hint that we had been up since three a.m. and were disinclined to talk.

CHAPTER XVI

More memorial stones—We get wet again—Unwilling hosts—A fall—The Franciscan of Zatrijebac—The ravine of the Zem—Methods of settling tribal differences—A change of diet and more pleasant evenings—A fatalist—Sunday morning.

Punctually at eight a.m. next morning we took an affectionate farewell of the Fathers, though I mounted hurriedly first to avoid the repetition of the welcoming chaste salute.

Our path lay for two hours over a rocky and barren country similar to the naked Katunska district round Cetinje. Gone were the rich green pasturages and wooded valleys in exchange for a waste of grey rocks. But a large wood was ultimately reached, only a little less dangerous than the wood of Vucipotok. Similar precautions were

observed in passing through—in fact, our carbines were carried loaded again all day. The Albanian border was never more than a rifle-shot away. Numerous gentle reminders of the dangers of the path existed in the shape of memorial stones all the way along. We met several families, all fully armed of course, driving their flocks before them to the mountain grazing-grounds of the Kom.

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It was about one o'clock when we emerged on a large barren plateau. On the further side, just across the border, lay the Albanian village of Korito, which Dr. S. knew, and where we intended spending the rest of the day and night.

Half-way across, a sudden storm of rain and hail came down, and I have never got wet through so quickly in my life. Within five minutes, the water was running out of my boots. My leather coat, though waterproof, let regular rivers down my neck. It was a rain that would not be denied, and icy cold.

In that waterspout we sat and waited while Dr. S. hunted up his friends; but apparently they had all left, with their flocks. A few Albanians appeared, and by the dint of much persuasion Dr. S. induced them to show us an empty hut. As soon as they had done this they left us, looking at us in an unfriendly and suspicious manner. We got our baggage in as quickly as possible, and by this time we were shivering with cold. No wood could be seen, and Dr. S. again sallied forth, and by the aid of small bribes some wood was brought and we soon had a fire burning.

However, our natural buoyancy rose again with the fire, and we made a very light meal off the food that we had with us. It was not more than a few mouthfuls apiece, but nothing could be got here. Then we solemnly stood round the fire and dried ourselves, the steam rising like pillars of cloud, and hiding our figures from each other. The warmth was very agreeable and comforting.

Several Albanians now crowded in, examining our arms, and were so unfriendly, not to say threatening, that we hastily reconsidered our plans. Firstly and foremostly, we had no food, watch would have to be kept all the time, over the horses and at the hut, using up two men, so the prospect was not pleasing.

So we saddled up and left about three for Zatrijebac, four hours' distance, happy to be rid of our unwilling hosts.

The difference between the treatment of strangers by Albanians and Montenegrins was very marked.[5]

Our path led us through the great wood of Kostice, and, owing to the recent heavy rain, the track, never very plain, was in parts entirely obliterated. Twice we lost ourselves, and once more a drenching shower came on, repeating the morning douche. Still we plodded on with stumbling horses over the slippery way till we emerged on the great plain or plateau of Zatrijebac. Zatrijebac is an Albanian clan several thousand strong who live under Montenegrin rule. They serve as Montenegrin subjects in the army, give no trouble except in occasional border fights with rival Albanian clans, and their bravery is proverbial. Further, they are Roman Catholics. The country is most curious, great slabs of stone lying about in a promiscuous fashion as if it had once rained them, and

the path was certainly the most vile of the whole trip, which is putting it as strongly as possible.

[Footnote 5: I have since learnt differently.—R.W.]

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It was climbing or rather scaling a small rock that my long-expected fall came. Alat, my horse, floundered badly at an angle of forty-five degrees and lost his balance completely. The doctor, who was behind, shouted to me to pull him up, but as I was sliding off his back with a broken girth at an ever-increasing velocity, I was unable to follow this very excellent advice. Down I came heavily on the stones, luckily on the high side of the path, landing on my back with my legs all mixed up in Alat's. My saddle and saddlebags followed me in quick succession, and something hit me violently over the head—that was my carbine. Providentially Alat stood still, and my cartridge belt saved my back.

I got up when I could sort out my legs, making remarks to Dr. S. about that girth which he said afterwards were quite artistic. Many, many years ago the girth may have been good and strong, and it had undoubtedly seen better days. Next I sought one named Stephan. He had always assured me that it would last another week. Montenegrins are careless about such things.

The rest of the way I had to walk, which dried me, as the path was steep and tiring. At the house of Dr. S. in Podgorica we had met a young Franciscan monk, a Neapolitan and a great student. He at once invited us to visit him in Zatrijebac, where he is the spiritual shepherd, and to spend a few weeks with him. On approaching a roofless church, in the course of rebuilding, we espied this young monk rushing to meet us. With all the fervour of his race, he embraced and kissed us repeatedly, welcoming us to his home. He gave me his bed, and the other remaining one was put at P.'s disposal, and he would not hear of our leaving next day or the next.

There are but two other Roman Catholic churches in Montenegro, in Antivari and Dulcigno,[6] in fact only where the Albanians are in sufficient evidence.

[Footnote 6: The Austrian Legation in Cetinje has also its own chapel.]

We had intended to visit Zatrijebac at the beginning of our mountain tour, but the district was considered unsafe at that time. A quarrel over the appointment of a new captain had led to the relations of the disappointed candidate shooting the brother of the new captain. Two boys, aged fifteen and sixteen respectively, had ambushed their victim, and put no less than seven bullets into him at a distance of four hundred yards, which is pretty good shooting. The boys got away across the border, but wholesale arrests took place, and it is not well to visit districts thus excited. The young Franciscan repeated to us the story that evening round the kitchen fire, where we spent very many happy hours. He spoke of it sadly.

"The vendetta is a terrible thing," he said. "It respects neither the laws of God nor man."

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Our host would not rest till he had shown me the famous view, and Dr. S. accompanied us. As one stands outside the church, a magnificent panorama is spread out, seemingly without a break. But should one wish to ascend the mountains opposite so temptingly near, a great ravine must be first descended. Ten minutes' walk brings one to the edge of a precipice 2,400 feet deep, so appalling and so sudden that one's breath is momentarily taken away. It is a spot to sit and meditate on the grandeur of the work of the Master of all architects. The majesty of that mighty ravine is, indeed, awe-inspiring.

At the bottom, a mere tiny thread, flows the Zem, a river which has often run blood, and whose source is hardly known as it rises in the unknown Procletia, "the Accursed Mountains" of history. A wall of mountains rises beyond. Steep and precipitous as is the descent on the Zatrijebac side, still a path trodden daily by mountaineers winds and zigzags down to the bottom. Then as we seated ourselves on a carefully selected and safe ledge and gazed on this unique picture, the monk told us of a bloody battle fought not so very many years ago by the men of Zatrijebac and the clan of Hotti who inhabit the opposite mountains. It was a quaint illustration how questions of boundary lines are settled without the aid of expensive Courts of Arbitration.

When the new frontier was laid down at the conclusion of the late war, the River Zem was Montenegro's limit. On the hill beyond lies a grazing-ground which has been used as a summer pasturage by the Zatrijebac from times immemorial. Though technically now belonging to Albania, and in particular to the clan of Hotti, the Zatrijebac still continued to drive their flocks across the ravine. The Hotti remonstrated, and finding this of no avail, took possession of the plateau. Their opponents coming over found the rival clan posted in a seemingly impregnable position on every point of vantage on that steep ascent. Though armed with inferior rifles (in those days), they attacked at once, and by reckless bravery came to hand-to-hand conflict. Then a terrible encounter ensued, men seized each other and threw themselves over the cliffs, and to complete the utter discomfiture of the Hotti, the Kuc came to the assistance of their neighbours and the Hotti were nearly annihilated. Since then no questions have been asked, and annually the cattle and sheep of Zatrijebac graze in peace in Albania.

It was a very similar dispute which has happened so very recently at Mokra near Andrijevica.[7]

Supper gave us a much needed change of diet. Boiled fowl and vegetables came as a luxury after days of tough and stringy lamb. We sat at a table again too, on chairs, and felt quite ashamed of our recently acquired habits.

The evenings round the kitchen fire were just as delightful as our hut experiences, and if possible, more novel. Here we had fierce Albanians, with their half-shaven heads and scalping lock, and a scholar, a student of philosophy, a man of wonderful ideals, in the form of the young Franciscan, instead of unkempt shepherds.

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[Footnote 7: Since writing the above another tribal disturbance has taken place between the Zatrijebac and the Hotti. This time it was the Hotti who drove their flocks, also from time immemorial, to a certain spot in Zatrijebac, and as the latter tribe have since cultivated the intervening ground, they felt justly irritated. As the only real argument is the rifle, they met and argued the point in this fashion in February, 1902, and many fell on both sides. A notable incident which is worth recording is, that a man of Hotti fought on the side of the Zatrijebac against his brethren and was killed. His body was afterwards handed back and his clan demanded to know if he had fought as a man. "In the front rank," was the answer. Then they took the body and gave it an honourable burial and agreed to let the dispute drop. In this action our friend the monk had his habit riddled with bullets whilst attending the wounded.]

Round the fire another evening an argument as to the wrongs of Fatalism, *i.e.* God's Will, led to a characteristic story by the monk in defence of his views. Dr. S., like many men who lead such lives as he does, was a rigid fatalist.

An Albanian found his enemy in vendetta, working in a field. Hiding himself, he prayed to God and S. Nicholas to direct the bullet.

"Lord," he prayed, "should I hit this man in the breast, then I shall know that I do this deed by Thy Will."

He laid his rifle on a stone, took careful aim, and the other fell dead shot through the breast.

"By God's Will I killed him," he answered, when the priest endeavoured to impress upon him his crime.

The lighter side of nature was given us by another story.

Shortly after the priest's arrival at Zatrijebac a half-naked man came to him. The worthy friar took pity on him and gave him a clean white shirt of his own.

On the following Sunday during the Mass, as he turned to his congregation to give the Benediction, to his horror he saw the man with the shirt drawn over all his ragged clothes, in a front row. It was with the greatest difficulty, he concluded, that he could restrain a smile.

We were afforded a novel and striking scene before we left Zatrijebac in the form of an open-air Mass on Sunday.

The church being in the course of rebuilding, a rough altar had been hastily constructed, or rather knocked up—for it was of most crude workmanship—of wood planks on a small grass plot.

From nine a.m. onwards the people began to assemble, coming from all parts of the large and straggling district, and sat about in groups gravely talking. Towards eleven o'clock a large number of peasants had arrived, and the altar was covered with not a fair white cloth as usual, but with something suspiciously resembling a long and not overclean towel. A tiny crucifix was placed upon it, and the young priest robed himself there in sight of the whole congregation.

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A group of elder men knelt or squatted on the small open space immediately in front of the High Altar, but the majority of worshippers ranged themselves under the shade of some small trees and on the low surrounding walls.

These same trees bear weekly a strange and incongruous fruit, for they are used as pegs whereon the Albanians hang their rifles during service. All round, the walls are stacked with rifles, for, like the Puritans of old, they come to church fully armed with rifle, handjar, and revolver, and round their waists, the inevitable bandolier of cartridges.

[Illustration: AFTER MASS AT ZATRIJEBAC]

On approaching the altar every man pushed back the cloth which is swathed round his half-shaven head, and kneeling, piously crossed himself. The older men displayed even more reverence, and kissed the earth. The younger men were much the same as their cultured and civilised brothers, lounging through the service, half seated on a wall, and barely crossing themselves.

But the general effect was one of great reverence and striking in the extreme. We watched this strange congregation with great interest, and during the most sacred part of the service, when all, even the blase young men, prostrated themselves, the effect was unique.

Picture a cut-throat, shave half his head, leaving a tuft of hair on the back by which he kindly assists his victor to decapitate him, expecting a like consideration in return, long drooping moustachios, clad in Turkish clothes, a belt full of cartridges, with revolver and murderous-looking yataghan artistically displayed—of such was this congregation. Men who half-an-hour afterwards would shoot an enemy in the course of a vendetta, or otherwise, without any thought of remorse. Yes, and coolly cut off his head and bring it home to his admiring wife and daughters, now so discreetly and respectfully kneeling behind them. This is not an over-drawn picture. It happens often.

Of such consisted the congregation under the green trees, blue sky, brilliant sunshine, in that perfect landscape this Sunday morning. And of such is peopled a part of the vast country of Albania. A people who hold human life as nothing—a reckless and brave nation of devout Roman Catholics.

At the conclusion of the service we came in for a lot of inspection, and going in to dine soon afterwards we chanced to look out of the window overlooking the scene of the morning Mass. Still a great crowd hung about, and on the late High Altar sat men smoking cigarettes. After dinner we bade farewell to our young host, amidst honest regrets on both sides. The Franciscan had given us a new insight into the mysteries of life.

CHAPTER XVII

A modern hero, and our sojourn under his roof—Keco's story—The laws of Vendetta and their incongruity—We return to Podgorica—The Montenegrin telephone—An elopement causes excitement—The Sultan's birthday—The reverse of the picture—A legal anomaly.

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“At Fundina,” said Dr. S., “you will meet one of the modern heroes of Montenegro. A man named Keco, whose fame has reached to the uttermost ends of the land.”

We had bidden farewell to our host and were riding past the last houses and huts of the clan of Zatrijebac on our way to Fundina. The path tended downwards, and shortly the great plain of the Zeta burst suddenly into view as we rounded a corner of the mountains. Beyond lay the Lake of Scutari with its background of mountains.

It was early in the evening when we reined in our horses before a modest stone house and dismounted. It was Fundina, a straggling village built on the sloping sides of a mountain from which it takes its name.

Voivoda Marko, the hero of Medun, defeated the Turks on these slopes in the first engagement of the last war, successfully inaugurating the campaigning which secured to Montenegro all the territory through which we had been riding for so many weeks, including the towns of Podgorica and Niksic, and the great valley now stretched at our feet.

Podgorica lies like an oasis of green trees on the rolling, but treeless, plain.

The Albanian border is but a rifle-shot away, and the village of Dinos and the fortress of Tusi are plainly to be seen.

We decided to spend the night here and hear Keco’s story, though Podgorica was only three hours’ distance. It would be a fitting finish to our mountain tour to sleep on the battlefield of Fundina, and in the house of a modern hero.

“I warn you,” remarked the doctor, “that Keco much belies his deeds by his appearance.”

Keco was not in his house when we arrived, and we had our ceremonial and inevitable black coffee brought to us on a small natural platform of rock overlooking the magnificent valley.

Shortly afterwards a small and insignificant man approached us, with haggard looks and grey hair. He greeted the doctor effusively.

“This is Keco,” said Dr. S.

As he took the tobacco tin which was proffered him his hands trembled so excessively that the rolling of a cigarette was a work of art.

“His nerves are gone,” explained the doctor. “He lives in hourly danger of his life.”

Keco soon left us to prepare our meal and quarters for the night, and it was not till after supper, when we were seated round the fire in his little house and smoking, that he would consent to tell his story. Even then he spoke at first reluctantly, but soon warmed to his subject. His wife was always present and looked anxious. Several men were in the room.

“Though my hands tremble and my hair is growing white,” he began, “yet I do not fear death. We must all die, and I know that my fate must speedily overtake me. This house I have built for my wife, and stocked with what money I had, to provide for her. They shall not kill me easily. Twice have they tried. The first time I was in the fields when men fired at me from a long distance. I took my rifle and made a detour, and, as my enemies recrossed the border, I was there waiting for them. But I did not hit one. Another time seven men hid themselves only thirty yards away from my house, in the evening, but they dared not shoot then, for my wife was by my side.”

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“You know,” explained the doctor, “the life of a woman is sacred; should a woman by the greatest accident shoot a man, the vendetta falls on her husband—she may not be touched; or, should a woman be killed in a vendetta, even by the merest accident, the shame would be unspeakable. The murderers and their families, or even their clan, would be blotted out, for in such revenge all would join. Keco’s wife never leaves his side after dusk, and, you see, she has saved his life once already within his knowledge; who knows how often unawares?”

“Tell us the origin of thy blood-guiltiness,” said we. Dr. S. had told us the story, but we wished to hear it from his lips.

“I had a cow which was my pride,” went on Keco. “She yielded more milk than any other cow and of a far better quality. Men praised the milk and the cheese when I took it to the market in Podgorica for sale, and none more than Achmet, a Turk from Dinos.

“One morning I went to milk my cow, and could find her nowhere. My most treasured possession was gone. I searched for her all that day and the next on the mountain sides, but in vain. On the next market day as I wandered gloomily across the market-place of Podgorica, Achmet, the Turk, accosted me.

“‘Where is thy milk?’ he asked, ’which is so wonderful, and where are thy marvellous cheeses?’

“I replied that I knew not, and would have passed on.

“‘Make thy mind easy,’ continued Achmet, an evil smile spreading over his face, ‘for I have thy cow.’

“‘Ah! she has strayed across the border,’ I cried. ’Thank God she is found.’

“‘She strayed across the border,’ said Achmet, ’but under my guidance. Thou hast not lied. Her milk is indeed of the good quality that thou hast boasted. For a Christian dog like thee she is far too good.’

“To this hour I wonder that I did not strike him dead. My rage rendered me powerless to move or see. It was as if a black cloud descended over my eyes. When I recovered, Achmet was gone.

“For many weeks I went to the Law Court whenever I visited the market, demanding the restitution of my cow by legal means, and each time was I put off by answers and promises. And Achmet was always on the market-place taunting me with tales of the cow and her calf. For she had calved. But the law is strict, and I never dared shoot him whilst in the town, and this the coward knew.

“When I saw that I should get no help from the law, I took two men from this village. They are here in this room,” he said, pointing to two men seated near us. “And one morning I went across to Dinos. I did not go at night, like the thief, but when the sun was highest, and when all could see me. I left my comrades outside Achmet’s house, and went in alone. There I found my cow and her calf, but only the women were present. So I drove the cow and the calf out of the door towards my comrades. Then, lest any should think that

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I was afraid, I fired my rifle into the air. Very soon the men came running from the fields, and amongst them Achmet and his son. When they saw me and my cow, they came towards me firing, but being unsteady from running, the bullets flew wide. Then I took careful aim and shot Achmet dead, and then his son. We then ran quickly, and though men pursued us, they were afraid to come too near lest I should shoot them likewise, and so we came back to Fundina in safety. Since then the men of Dinos wait for me, and they will kill me soon, for the insult is very great that I have put upon them, and the fame of my deed has travelled into all lands." As he said this his eyes lit with fire, and the spirit of heroism shone out in the seemingly timid-looking man.

"Must thou stay here, in Fundina?" I asked, "where thy enemies are so near. Why not go to Cetinje or Niksic?"

"Men know me for a hero," he answered proudly. "What would they say if I ran away and sought safety elsewhere? I should be a double coward, for I should leave my brothers to inherit my fate. No, I shall wait here till they come, and they shall not find me unprepared or sleeping. See, every night I make my bed in a different place, sometimes in one room of the house, sometimes in the bushes outside. They never know where I shall sleep, for these dogs love to kill their enemy in the night."

Silence fell upon us as Keco finished. The wood fire crackled and flickered, lighting up fitfully the serious faces of the men sitting round.

Half guessing our thoughts, Keco said—

"To-night no attack will be made. We shall keep guard outside."

We felt abashed. We confess thoughts of a nocturnal assassination had not pleased us, and yet these wild mountaineers had already provided for such a contingency. When we went outside the house before turning in, Dr. S. pointed out the figure of a motionless sentinel leaning on his rifle some little distance away.

"It is odd that the women are so respected," I remarked to the doctor, "when no other law seems recognised. Do they never take part in a vendetta?"

"Never as a woman," said the doctor. "If it should happen that a woman is the last surviving member of a family, the rest having been killed in a vendetta, she may continue the feud, but as a man. She then assumes the clothes of the opposite sex, procures arms and cuts herself off from the world, living as a hermit. Do you remember that Albanian woman at Easter time in Podgorica who kissed me so fervently?"

We nodded, for we had been much amused at the scene. A wild-looking, unkempt Albanian woman had kissed the doctor most effusively.

“Though she had assumed the woman’s garb for the Easter festival, she is to all intents and purposes a man, and hence the man’s kiss of peace. She then asked me for a revolver which I had promised her some time ago.”

We turned in soon after, but not before we heard another story.

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Two cairns on the road to Plavnica, and but half an hour from Podgorica, had often been pointed out to us. They were erected to the memory of an attack made on four gendarmes in connection with a long-standing vendetta. A party of Albanians had hidden themselves in two hollows beside the main road at night and as the gendarmes passed they fired into them, killing one and badly wounding two others. This happened shortly before our arrival.

Another scene had been enacted a few days ago which they now related to us, to prevent us perhaps thinking too much of Keco's story, and dreaming of it.

The men of the Zeta had sworn revenge for the death of their gendarme, a famous man and great favourite, but at the time Prince Nicolas had sternly forbidden reprisals. But such things are not forgotten, and a man had crossed the Zem into Albania. Coming on a party of men working in a field, he had fired, but his aim was unsteady, and he only wounded his intended victim slightly. Then he fled, hotly pursued, and received a bad wound as he crossed an open space. Still he managed to elude his pursuers for the time being, and reached the River Zem. Here his strength failed him and he clung, half fainting from loss of blood, to the bushes fringing the bank, unable to go any further. In this position a man of the clan Hotti found him, as he was coming along the river. Having heard the shots and seeing a bleeding Montenegrin, he put two and two together and promptly shot him. The other Albanians, directed by the report, now came up, and literally hacked the corpse to pieces. So the Zeta peasants are now two deaths to the bad. In conclusion, we were told that the authorities have reason to believe that the murdered man had been accompanied by others on his raid into a friendly country and were seeking for these men most diligently to punish them severely.

For their violating the border laws?

No, for deserting their comrade, and leaving him to meet his death alone, and the sentence for this craven deed is ten years.

Next morning we rode into Podgorica, and comparative civilisation, after a period of roughing it of the hardest description. We had often gone from five a.m. till seven or eight p.m. on a couple of eggs and an occasional glass of milk, and had hard going all the time. It proved to us pretty conclusively how we of civilised lands disgustingly and habitually overeat ourselves.

We finished considerably harder and more fit than at the start, and we had lived the whole time as the Montenegrins of the mountains live.

One remarkable gift of which these mountaineers are possessed, and which deserves special remark, is that of long-distance talking. Men can speak with each other in the higher altitudes at distances of five miles and more, where our ears could hardly distinguish a faint sound of the human voice. Children are accustomed to it at an early

age, and the quaint sight of a mother conversing with her child guarding some sheep on a neighbouring hillside is often to be witnessed. This gift must be acquired young, it seems, for Dr. S., who has lived twelve years amongst the Montenegrins, could neither make himself heard, nor understand, though he said that he had given himself much pains to learn the art.

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As we rode into Podgorica that morning, we were struck by meeting several groups of the Turkish inhabitants hanging about outside the town. Arriving in the town, only Montenegrins were to be seen in the streets, walking somewhat ostentatiously up and down, their natural swagger greatly exaggerated. The news of the elopement of another Turkish maiden soon reached us, and that day at dinner, an officer, detailed to prove the matter, told us the story.

A young Montenegrin had won the heart of the maiden, and accompanied by a friend, he had gone to the wall of her house and given a preconcerted signal. The girl had come, but a dispute now arose between the men as to who should ultimately marry her, and she, in great disgust, had told them to go away and settle the matter. It seems that the girl had no particular wishes as to whom she should marry. At last the friends arranged matters satisfactorily and the girl was abducted, if one can call an elopement an abduction. However, in the eyes of the Turks it was a forcible abduction, and the fact that the girl was related to the most influential Turk in the town did not improve matters. The Beg had demanded the restitution of the girl at once and punishment of the offenders. The Prince had sent officials to settle the dispute. The girl, however, very naturally refused to be given back, as she would probably have been killed, and insisted on her baptism and marriage taking place forthwith.

As the officer said to us—

“This is a free country, and we shall not give back the maiden against her will.”

This had incensed the Turks beyond measure. The town was being patrolled nightly, and the Beg attempted flight to mark his anger. But this the Prince would not allow, and the Beg was stopped by gendarmes as he was entering a carriage one night. Only if he first gave up his orders, decorations, and his sword of honour, and, furthermore, took his wives and belongings with him, could he leave the country.

Such was the state of affairs on our return. At night we went armed, and really had hopes of seeing a street fight. One evening a shot was fired in the town, and in the twinkling of an eye men turned out rifle in hand. Nothing came of it, and the crowd of several hundred armed Montenegrins slowly dispersed. Had further shots been fired, we were told, the peasants from far and near would have taken up the alarm, and in an hour thousands would have flocked into the town. No wonder the Turks were chary of taking revenge into their own hands.[8]

[Footnote 8: Again, since writing the above, this statement has been fully proved. In February, 1902, a party of Turkish soldiers, half starved in their frontier block-houses, attempted a raid into Montenegro. They were accompanied by a brother of the famous Achmet Uiko; whose story has been related elsewhere. In spite of the caution which the raiders displayed, the news reached Podgorica as soon

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as they had crossed the border and seemingly eluded the vigilance of the Montenegrin frontier guards. A party of Montenegrins lay in wait for them in Dr. S.'s summer garden (a spot where we had often spent many pleasant hours) and the Turks were challenged. As an answer the marauders fired at their unseen challengers, doing no harm, but an answering volley killed two of them. The rest were captured, one only making good his escape, and were brought into the town. But the volleys had alarmed the whole district, hundreds of men pouring into Podgorica from all the neighbouring villages and hills, till many thousands had assembled. —Cetinje, March, 1902.]

But the mischief done was great. Many families emigrated, much to Prince Nicolas' anger, for he encourages by every means in his power the extension of the Turkish population. They bring trade and cultivate the lands far more diligently than the Montenegrin warriors.

So it was that we witnessed during these few days the festival of the Sultan's birthday, which seemed strangely incongruous considering the mixed feelings of the inhabitants.

In the morning, all the town officials called on the Turkish Consul. The militia were formed up and the whole, led by the Montenegrin War Banner, proceeded in solemn procession to the principal mosque. On their return, a royal salute was fired from a bastion of the old wall, and in the evening the town was illuminated.

It was an extraordinary sight, and one not easily to be forgotten. All the houses stuck candles in every window, by order of the Prince; the market-place and the War Memorial were covered with lamps, but the most striking feature of all was the illumination on a small hill immediately behind the old town. This hill overlooks the town, and was covered by rows of lamps. In the streets Turks, Albanians, and Montenegrins jostled each other; at peace, at any rate, for one evening.

A day or two later, a very different spectacle could have been witnessed. The main street leading to the church on the outskirts of the town was lined by waiting Montenegrins, and not a Turk was to be seen. Soon a carriage drove rapidly from the church, with a blushing Montenegrin girl and a gold-embroidered Montenegrin at her side. It was the late Turkish maiden, now a radiant Montenegrin bride and Christian. Several Turks had been caught endeavouring to approach the church with revolvers concealed, but were promptly turned back.

And so ended an eventful week.

One day, quite by accident, we discovered the arrest-house, or place where prisoners are detained pending their trial and sentence. We were passing a door which led down by a few steps into a courtyard, when an acquaintance of ours accosted us.

We went inside and spoke to him for some minutes. He was a merry individual and a clerk in a Government office.

He requested us to bring our camera and photograph him on the next day. Then he moved and a chain clanked. Neither of us had realised that this was a prison till that moment, though we had passed that door many times.

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Next day we came again, and took a picture of our genial friend, whom we found seated and playing the gusla to a crowd of other prisoners, some exceedingly heavily chained.

One or two guards came up and we spent an hour in a pleasant chat.

Our friend was only “in” for a few days for making a rude remark about the Chief of Police. The chained men were mostly murderers, if we may use such a harsh term for those who are compelled to kill their enemies by the relentless laws of the vendetta, and who would be punished by the laws of man should they prove themselves guilty of cowardice.

The vendetta in Montenegro is a legal anomaly. Men are punished in either case.

CHAPTER XVIII

S. Vasili and Ostrog—Our drive thither—Joyful pilgrims—Varied costumes—We meet the Vladika of Montenegro—The ordeal of hot coffee—A real pilgrimage—-The shrine of S. Vasili—The ancient hermit—A miracle—Niksic—The gaudy cathedral and the Prince’s palace—We are disappointed in Niksic.

Though we visited the famous Monastery of Ostrog at the very beginning of our visit to Montenegro, and Niksic at the conclusion, both places lie so near together that we put them now in this order for the sake of simplicity.

It was our good fortune to be enabled to witness the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of S. Vasili, which takes place during the Greek Whitsuntide.

Ostrog is the Lourdes of the Balkans, as many equally miraculous cures take place as at the Roman Catholic rival in the Pyrenees. The Serb-speaking races from far and near flock there in enormous numbers, as well as many Mahometans and Catholics.

S. Vasili (or Basil) was a native of the Hercegovina and a holy man of great repute. About a century ago he had a vision telling him to travel to Montenegro, and there to found a monastery. Accordingly he set out, taking with him a great quantity of building material, and chose a spot not far from Podgorica, on the right bank of the Zeta. But in the night the material disappeared, and S. Vasili hunted high and low. After a weary search it was found at Ostrog, and there he built his place of retreat, living many years, working many miracles, and dying as a saint. He is buried there, and it is said that any believer has but to visit the shrine, and whatever his wish may be, it will be fulfilled. Thus cripples have walked back the way which they were carried, sick have been made whole, and the mentally afflicted have gone away rejoicing. Certain it is that many wonderful cures are yearly effected there.

Furthermore, the name of Ostrog appears often in the glorious annals of Montenegrin history. The oft-told tale of Prince Nicolas' father, Mirko, "The Sword of Montenegro," who was besieged in that inaccessible cleft in a precipice with a handful of men, is one of the most famous feats of Montenegrin arms. The charred cliffs still bear silent witness to the efforts which the Turks made to burn out the little garrison by throwing bundles of flaming straw from above.

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Ostrog is about six hours' drive from Podgorica. The road passes along the River Zeta, leaving the village of Spuz on the right, and past the flourishing little town of Danilovgrad, soon to be the connecting town between Cetinje and Niksic on completion of the projected road.

There is nothing of interest in Danilovgrad, though the market is of some importance. A little way beyond the town a nearly complete building can be noticed. It is the lunatic asylum.

From this point onwards the road ascends slowly but steadily until a deep valley lies to the right, and the Zeta assumes quite diminutive proportions. The mountains opposite rise to an ever-increasing height, until a few tiny buildings can be made out by the help of field-glasses. It is Ostrog. That morning we could make out the tents and booths of the pilgrims, and a dark mass of surging humanity. But it is still a very long distance away. The road climbs up to the head of the valley to the village of Bogetic, full that morning of the carriages of the wealthy pilgrims. During the Whitsun festival carriages are scarcely to be procured in the whole of Montenegro, or in Cattaro either.

We broke our fast here, and then drove for another mile or so where a path leaves the road, and the pilgrim has either to proceed on horseback or on foot. We had to go on foot, and a very long and tiring walk it proved to be. Besides Dr. S. and his factotum, Lazo, we took another man with us, a wretched puny individual, but seemingly possessed of more endurance than any of us. He led us by a short cut over rocks, and up slippery breakneck walls of cliffs, over which our guide skipped nimbly, and having reached the top seemingly hours before us, sat down and beamed benevolently.

Half-way, the rain came down in sheets, and we took shelter in a wayside inn, or rather hut. It was crowded with returning pilgrims whom the threatening weather had forced to depart earlier than is their wont.

As the weather momentarily cleared, we pushed on, and the remaining distance was one of the most interesting walks it had been our fortune to witness. A ceaseless stream of pilgrims poured down the rocky path. It came on to rain again, but one and all wished us luck in the name of God and S. Vasili. Nearly every costume of the Balkans was represented. The Bosnian, in sack-shaped baggy trousers, fitting the lower leg, either of crimson or blue cloth, a smart-coloured Turkish jacket, a broad shawl round his waist displaying armouries of knives and pistols, on his head a fez wound round with a huge turban cloth, mounted, or leading a pack-horse; his wife in coarse black trousers; the Hercegovinans, with breastplates of silver ornaments, exquisite in workmanship and of great antiquity; sombre Servians, and white-clad Albanians, whose trousers are embroidered with black braid in fantastic tracing; fez, head-cloth, and neat little Montenegrin cap; trousers of red, pink, blue and black; gigantic Albanians in high riding-boots, sitting their horses like Life Guardsmen; Macedonians, Greeks, and even pure-blooded Turks; Montenegrins in creamy white frock-coats worn over gold-braided

crimson jackets; and dark-blue costumes with red worsted tassels of the poor Dalmatian peasants—all passed us in bewildering confusion.

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The women (who were for the most part Montenegrin) showed up well in comparison with their sisters from Sarajevo, whose attire is, to say the least, comical. For in the larger towns of the Austrian occupation territory they are undergoing the stage from East to West, and appear in huge Turkish trousers and cheap, gaudy European blouses. The contrast between the Sarajevan and the graceful Montenegrin is positively ludicrous. But of all the costumes, male and female, the palm must be given to the Montenegrin. They carry themselves with a princely air, and their picturesque costume is a model of good taste; for Montenegro is, as Mr. Gladstone has remarked, the beach on which was thrown up the remnants of Balkan freedom. After the battle of Kossovo, all the Serb nobility who would not submit to the Turk fled to Crnagora, and the traces of heredity are easily to be recognised in their superb carriage.

[Illustration: MONTENEGRIN WOMEN]

It was well after midday when we reached the plateau on which the lower and modern monastery is situated. We entered through a gate into a wide path bordered with booths in which crowds of joyful pilgrims sat refreshing themselves. In spite of the departing crowds that we had passed, the place was still densely packed, for over twenty thousand people visit Ostrog. We squeezed into one of the booths and sat watching the surging mass pass to and fro.

The mixture of costume was even more marked than on the path below. It was a brilliant kaleidoscope of colour. Nothing but colour—colour. Very rarely could a man in European clothes (the richer Dalmatians) be noticed, and he seemed strangely out of place and harmony.

As we sat and gazed, two Bosnian minstrels, from bad memory and an indifferent ear, began playing on a fiddle and a guitar, and though their music was atrocious, the wild Turkish songs which they sang gave the finishing touch to the scene. It was not till they began playing snatches of music-hall airs, such long-forgotten tunes as “Daisy,” that we hurriedly moved on.

The Archbishop, Mitrofanban, heard of our arrival soon after, and immediately sent for us. When we approached, he was sitting on the steps of a house, surrounded by a brilliant staff of Montenegrin nobles and many priests, while below a great crowd of pilgrims stood in a ring, watching the national dance, which was being performed before His Grace. The dance stopped as we drew near. The Archbishop received us very kindly—this was our first meeting with him—and expressed his pleasure to see strangers from such a distant land in Ostrog. He assigned a room to us in his house, and gave orders for us to be fed during our stay. Murmuring our thanks, we attempted to withdraw, but we did not escape before we had solemnly drunk the usual coffee. It was rather an ordeal to consume that very hot coffee in the face of the multitude, and we were painfully conscious of our many shortcomings in personal appearance.

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Muddy and half-wet riding clothes and flannel shirts do not seem to go with crimson and gold, high boots of patent leather, and sparkling orders. A Horseguardsman's uniform would be more in keeping. When we left, the dancing resumed and was kept up till a late hour that night. We noticed another national dance at Ostrog. A much more barbaric performance than the stately and solemn movement of the ring dance, or kolo.

In this case two performers dance at a time, a man and a woman. A small ring is made by the spectators, who also supply the relay couples. The man endeavours to spring as high as possible into the air, emitting short, Red Indian yells, and firing his revolver. The woman gives more decorous jumps; and, keeping opposite each other, they leap backwards and forwards across the small open space. After a few minutes they are unceremoniously pushed aside, after giving each other a hasty kiss, and another couple takes their place. This goes on *ad lib.*, and we were soothed to sleep by those wild yells.

[Illustration: THE LOWER MONASTERY, OSTROG]

Next morning we were up bright and early, and about seven o'clock commenced the actual pilgrimage. A steep and stony path winds up through a dense wood for about an hour. Fanatical pilgrims make this journey sometimes barefoot, but the ordeal is sufficiently severe without these little additions. The whole way is lined with beggars, sometimes hardly recognisable as human beings, who must reap a rich harvest by the exhibition of their ghastly woes. *They* constitute the ordeal.

Maimed stumps of limbs, deformed children, repulsive and festering sores, and other diseases too foul for description were proudly exhibited at every step. A cap was placed invitingly in front of each, and partly filled with alms already given. In piteous agony diseased hands and quavering voices besought us in the name of God and their saint to alleviate their sufferings with the gift of a kreutzer. It was not a sight that will lightly escape the memory.

We reached the top, hot and nauseated, but were fully compensated by the unique view. The monastery is built under an overhanging precipice which rises to a giddy height above. The charred rocks bear telling evidence to the miracles which have saved the little edifice from burning.

We went straight to the shrine, through a little door scarcely more than four feet high (the wooden lintels of which being the handiwork of S. Vasili were piously kissed by the Montenegrins), through two long and narrow passages hewn from the living rock and emerged suddenly in a small rock chamber, dimly lit by an oil lamp and about twelve feet square. The five of us filled the space, and, as our eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, we were able to distinguish a wooden shrine taking up the whole length of one

side—where the mortal remains of the Hercegovinan lay. Another side was occupied by an open coffin containing the vestments and crucifix. On a chair sat a Greek priest who rose when we entered. At the foot of the shrine lay a cripple.

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We stood for some minutes in utter silence, and then followed the lead of the doctor, who approached the coffin and kissed the crucifix, which a priest gave to us all in turn: a plate for alms lay on the vestments: then the woodwork of the shrine was likewise kissed, and we emerged again into the narrow gallery.

The heat had been intense in the little chapel, and we were in that limp and exhausted state that one experiences in a Turkish bath.

[Illustration: THE UPPER MONASTERY]

The gallery was open on one side where a large bell was fixed, and this our puny guide struck four times vigorously in the sign of a cross without a word of warning.

After the impressive solemnity and silence of the preceding minutes, we nearly jumped out of our skins, and when our injured hearing had sufficiently recovered so that we could distinguish the sound of our own voices, we demanded an explanation of this apparently childish and wanton outrage.

He said that he had struck the bell for the renewal of his strength. It appeared an unnecessary request.

Dr. S. explained that pilgrims strike the bell on emerging from the shrine, praying for some special benefit.

We next went up a lot of steps to a platform under the shelving cliff where there was a beautiful spring of water. The view which it commanded was magnificent. Below us lay the lower monastery and the deep valley of the Zeta, the mountains rising again sharply on the further side; to the right and left stretched wooded slopes.

Then we descended again and paid the priest a visit. This man, over eighty years of age, has spent forty years of his life as a hermit in that rocky crag. With the exception of Whitsuntide and the occasional visits of pilgrims, he lives entirely alone, subsisting on vegetables. His appearance was most patriarchal, his snowy white beard and saintly look impressing us greatly. When he heard that we were from England, he embraced and kissed us repeatedly, much to our embarrassment. His joy knew no bounds, and he kept us with him in his rock-hewn cell for a considerable time. He even consented to be photographed, for the first time in his life, facing the ordeal with unflinching courage.

The descent to the lower monastery was made in record time, and with half-closed eyes. We found the Archbishop standing in the shade of an enormous tree surrounded by a large ring of Montenegrins. He beckoned to us, asking us for our impressions, and needless to say we solemnly drank coffee. This beverage began to pall before we left Montenegro.

After partaking of a splendid meal (for the country), washed down with wine such as is not to be obtained elsewhere in the land, we paid a farewell visit to His Grace and departed.

Already the booths were fast disappearing and a mere handful of peasants remained. Many pilgrims journey from seven to eight days on foot or on horseback to Ostrog, over mountain passes and barren regions; so that the pilgrimage is very real.

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Before we leave Ostrog, we will mention one of the miracles which we had the opportunity of authenticating.

A wretched Turk living to-day in Podgorica, a cripple crawling painfully on hands and knees, once made the pilgrimage to Ostrog. Friends carried him to the shrine, where he lay all night. Then he rose up and walked back to Podgorica rejoicing, with those who had carried him the day before. As he crossed the Vizier bridge, he sceptically remarked that he would have been healed without undergoing the farce of the pilgrimage. Straightway he fell to the ground, the same helpless cripple that he was before.

The Turk and the witnesses still live—in fact it happened but a few years ago—to tell the tale.

The road to Niksic, which we left to proceed to Ostrog, climbs to the height of 750 metres in crossing the mountain ridge dividing the valley of the Zeta from that of Niksic. The scenery is throughout fine and wild. In a succession of serpentines, the road descends sharply on to the great plain, the fertile valley of Niksic.

The town can be seen immediately on leaving the mountainous gorge, the cupola of the cathedral standing up boldly from the surrounding flat.

A long viaduct is crossed, built by the Russians, at the foot of the mountain, for in the winter floods are common, and Niksic was at times nearly cut off from the rest of Montenegro.

Niksic is probably the coming capital of Montenegro. In fact, it has been but a question of money that has prevented the removal of the Government from Cetinje a long time ago.

The Prince has recently built himself a large palace, the Russians have erected a large church, and roads are now in the course of construction connecting it with Risano on the Bocche di Cattaro, and Cetinje, and again with the Cattaro-Cetinje road.

When these roads are completed, Niksic will have a most central position, and the unquestionably rich and fertile plain can be opened up. Without doubt it is the coming trading centre, and already it is running Podgorica very close.

The day after our arrival—we had arrived in the night—we saw the town under most unfavourable conditions. A violent thunderstorm had raged incessantly for many hours, and the streets were in parts inundated. Water was pouring in miniature waterfalls from the ground floors of many houses which possessed a higher background. Braving the elements, and often making detours to avoid the lakes, we walked to the palace and the church. Both lie together outside the town.

A flight of steps lead up an artificial mound, over-shadowing the somewhat barrack-like palace, where stands the new cathedral. It is the most striking edifice in the whole country, surmounted with a dingy light yellow cupola. It is not pretty or tasteful, but it is distinctly imposing, and one can well realise the marvellings that it has given the simple Montenegrins. Inside it is severely plain and void of any furniture, except the thrones for the Royal Family. Round the walls are lists of the men who have fallen in recent wars.

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[Illustration: THE CHURCH, NIKSIC]

[Illustration: THE CHURCH AND PALACE]

The platform on which the church stands commands a view of the country. The simplicity of Prince Nicolas' palace is thus accentuated, for it is situated on perfectly open ground, and there is no garden or any railings round it. Naked and forlorn, it gives the spectator a sad impression of poverty. On another side is the old Church of Niksic, ridiculously small and half-ruined. The Russians did a good deed, for the comparison is absolutely absurd if a comparison can be drawn between a hovel and a S. Peter's.

The town is a long straggling collection of small houses, very uninteresting and plain, and beyond lies the historical ruin of the old fortress, stormed by Prince Nicolas in person.

In the town itself, broad streets and an enormous market-place are the only features.

We spent a few days in Niksic, but in this instance we were never able to rid ourselves of the first impressions, and we left gladly, though the town was not without its humour. It contains the only brewery in Montenegro, a ramshackle place and producing very poor beer. The post office is a tumble-down outhouse, also we were shown the house which would in the course of time be the Bank of Montenegro.

It is hard to realise that Niksic is the coming town, in spite of its gaudy cathedral, but progress makes sometimes wonderful strides.

Our visit to Niksic was a failure all round. We arrived to see the Prince ride out of the town at the head of a great cavalcade for the mountains, and again missed the opportunity of presenting ourselves.

Our intended tour to the Durmitor, Montenegro's highest mountain, was frustrated, owing to the Prince's retinue having taken every horse in the place, in addition to the weather having completely broken up, and so we missed one of the finest parts of the country.

CHAPTER XIX

The Club and its members—Gugga—Irregularities of time—The absence of the gentle muse and our surprise—The musician's story and his subsequent fate—-The Black Earth—A typical border house—The ordeal of infancy—A realistic performance which is misunderstood—Concerning a memorable drive—A fervent prayer.

Before we leave Podgorica for good our readers must be introduced to the Club. It was not a club in the English sense of the word, but P. and I always called that hour or two at sunset so delightfully spent in the company of that cosmopolitan gathering, the Club. Podgorica was our base, from which we made all our trips and excursions, so that we were there off and on during the whole of our lengthy sojourn amongst the sons of the Black Mountain. From the “members” we gleaned many stories of past and present vendettas and quaint customs which we had not had the good fortune to witness ourselves. Amongst the regular members was of course Dr. S.,

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who was three nationalities rolled into one—to explain, born in Roumania, he entered into Austrian service and became an Austrian subject, and finally twelve years in Montenegro had quite “Montenegrinised” him. He was very angry if we told him this. In the course of his duties as sole veterinary surgeon he had travelled, and travelled continually from one end of the land to the other, there was not a corner or collection of huts where he had not been. He had been snowed up in winter in the mountains, attacked by wolves, and shot at by Albanians, and had witnessed many a scene of the vendetta.

Another even more interesting character was L., an Austrian, who for years had been employed by scientific institutions in ornithological and geological research in Montenegro and Albania. He had carried his life in his hands for weeks together amongst the untameable mountaineers across the border. A man whose terribly hard life had turned him into a man of bone and muscle, rivalling the most active Montenegrin in strength and endurance. And what a fund of anecdote and adventure he could reel off! Without doubt he was one of the most interesting and fascinating men we have ever met; a perfect rifle, gun, and revolver shot, fine horseman and entertaining companion.

Then there was a Montenegrin professor, he was the father of the party, though the tales *he* told were not at all becoming to his age and learning. He spoke about eight languages well and perhaps that had slightly turned his brain. Once he had served a term of imprisonment for an outspoken criticism, and when he became tired of it, he sent an ultimatum to the effect that if he were not released at once, he would break out himself, take a rifle and bundle of cartridges and hold the Lovcen (a high mountain) against all comers. The originality of his threat gained him his freedom. Since then he has kept a closer guard over that unruly member and only unburdened himself in the seclusion of the Club. Otherwise P., myself, and a young and intensely patriotic Scotchman completed the list of regular members.

We had a few occasional “country members,” officers and officials whom some of us knew well from Cetinje or Niksic, but we were mostly alone. At first we met in the garden of one Petri, a good-tempered giant of about six feet eight inches, but in spite of our patronage he managed to ruin himself at cards and so we were forced to adjourn to an old Albanian rascal named Gugga. What fun we had with that dear old boy, whom we irreverently called Skenderbeg! One day in a moment of ill-advised confidence he had told us that he was descended from that great Albanian hero and patriot. But he was an educated and travelled man, having lived for many years in Venice, spoke an excellent Italian and correspondingly atrocious German, which latter he delighted to inflict upon us. He was most amusing in his hatred and contempt of the Montenegrin peasant.

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Gugga kept a big shop, and when irritated by a customer he had a regular formula which loses much of its wit when translated, as it rhymes in Serb. The humble Montenegrin is remarkably feminine in the way he shops. He will spend half an hour in the store examining everything with great curiosity. At last he will ask the price of a certain article. Gugga, whose choler has been slowly rising during his customer's long and tiring inspection, gives a purposely indistinct answer, whereupon the Montenegrin will inquire "What does he say?" Gugga, furious at being spoken to in the third person, turns savagely upon the astonished Montenegrin saying—

"What dost thou say? What dost thou mean?
What stinks here? Get out, ass and son of an ass."

Another famous saying of his was in speaking of Montenegro, its past and present rulers. "This land," Gugga would say in all seriousness, "was first accursed by God, its maker; then by Diocletian, then by the Sultan, then by our Gospodar (Prince), and lastly by Gospodin Milovan." Gospodin (Mr.) Milovan was the last Governor of Podgorica, a man always endeavouring to introduce modern improvements into the town, much to the disgust of its inhabitants who are nothing if not conservative, and amongst other sufferers was our friend Gugga. He substitutes the word "blessed" for "accursed," according to his audience.

We met after the arrival of the mail diligence from Cetinje about half-past six or seven o'clock in the evening. Proceedings usually commenced with a heated argument as to the time, the last comer being accused of unpunctuality. It was always an unsatisfactory argument, for no member ever had the same time as another. A sort of go-as-you-please time was kept in the town, but as either your watch invariably gained ten minutes in the day—according to the town clock it did—or lost a quarter of an hour, no one had any confidence in the official time, and each swore to the regularity of his own timepiece. One great advantage of this discrepancy of time was that try as one would, one was never late for an appointment. Somebody was sure to be present to back up an indignant protest, that you were five minutes early.

One evening was particularly memorable, it was in Petri's garden, then, that we had met as usual. P. was in a pensive and sentimental mood, usually caused by the magnificent sunsets. From our table we commanded a splendid view of those crimson-tinted peaks in the far distance, and the mysterious purple gloom which, like a rich robe, covered the intervening hills. By some strange coincidence the subject of music came up, and P. bitterly lamented the absence of that gentle muse from such grand surroundings. I don't believe there is a piano in the country except at the girls' school at Cetinje. The Scotchman had suggested the gusla as a substitute, and had been met with derisive laughter, for he had made the suggestion in all good faith. He was

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one of the most unmusical men I have ever met. The professor had followed this up with a learned discourse on the gusla, and the lesson to be learnt from it in the origin and development of modern music, when suddenly the sounds of a violin, being tuned in the room behind us, arrested his flow of speech. In another few moments the unseen musician began to play, and a deep silence fell upon us, for he was playing our music and recalling memories of bygone days. Snatches from Italian opera, and old well-known songs followed each other as we sat in the twilight and listened, conjuring up pictures of opera-house and concert-hall in this far-away land. Then the music ceased, and the tinkling of coins on a plate proclaimed the status of our serenader. In a few minutes a ragged, fair-haired boy stood before us, wearily holding a plate in his hand. As we dived into our pockets the doctor asked him in Serb, who he was and whence he came. He gazed blankly in answer, and P. said to me, “He looks quite English.” A joyful smile lit up his tired face as he answered—

“I am English, sir. I will fetch father; he will be so pleased.”

His father came out, a battered violin under his arm, and we were all struck with his miserable half-starved and ragged appearance. He played to us, he did not even play well, poor fellow, but still we listened appreciatively, and then some of us took him home, fed him, and we all contributed to his wardrobe. We were all of different sizes and build, and the result was sadly comical. Before he left us he told his story. It was not new or even interesting, but intensely pathetic; one of a large family, fair education, and finally a clerk at L80 a year. A pretty typewriter, marriage, and no help from his father. First the girl wife was dismissed, and then the boy husband. The child was born, and the mother died from lack of proper nourishment and comfort. For a few years the father earned a few coppers by playing before public-houses in the East End, and then took to the road. Somehow or other he found himself on the Continent, and after many years he had turned up here. It was all very vague and incoherent. Often starving, homeless, and speaking no language but his own, is it to be wondered that the man had lost count of days, years, and time? Now he had a desire to journey to Greece, why, he knew not, but he clung to it with all a weak man’s obstinacy. We could never let him trudge through Albania, and so the Scotchman procured him a free passage to Corfu by steamer. He left us one morning, leading his son by the hand, and over his shoulder a sack containing his worldly possessions, a sorrowful, ludicrous, and pitiful picture.

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Many weeks afterwards—P. and I had been on an expedition in the meantime—we sat again in Petri's garden at just such a sunset. We remembered the musician, and one of us jokingly remarked that his music would not be so appreciated in Greece as by us music-starved exiles. Then the Austrian told us the sequel. He had heard it from a murderous Albanian friend of his, who sometimes brought him specimens. The wanderer had not used his ticket, and had walked from Antivari to Dulcigno, from thence he had attempted his original plan of crossing Albania on foot. He knew nothing of geography or nationality, and doubtless imagined that he could earn his way as in a civilised country. On the way to Scutari a band of Albanians stopped him, and he played to them. The instrument pleased them, and they took it from him. Then they took the boy—though why they did so is not clear, for they do not kidnap children—and the father, in a fit of wild despair, sprang at the nearest Albanian. The Albanians are always glad of an excuse to kill; the wanderer found his death in perhaps the only moment of heroism that he had displayed throughout his wretched life. Such, though, was the story our informant had gleaned, and it took the edge off our evening's amusement.

But other evenings we were merry, and many were the wonderful stories of adventure told over bottled beer and an extraordinary salad which old Gugga mixed before us—to make an appetite, as he said.

We got to love Podgorica in the end, and left its streets, full of gaudy-coloured humanity, the old shot-riddled town across the river, and the glorious mountain panorama, with sorrow. There was always something to talk about, from a threatened raid of the Albanians to the abduction of a Turkish maiden. Death is always very near in that unknown border town.

The day of our final departure from Podgorica, we drove to the famous Crna Zemlja, or Black Earth.

The object of our visit was chiefly to call on a young Albanian, who had repeatedly invited us. Though an Albanian, he is a Montenegrin subject and a corporal in the standing army.

As a matter of fact, he is a fugitive from his clan, the Klementi, where his life is forfeited in a blood feud. The Prince wisely uses such men as a kind of extra border guard, giving them land and houses on the actual frontier line, knowing that they will keep a doubly sharp watch to preserve their own lives.

The Black Earth is an absolutely flat and treeless plain, covered at times with grass, which mischievous Albanians love to set fire to in the hopes of some sport with peasants, who might attempt to extinguish the conflagration. The River Zem divides it and constitutes the boundary, but the land on both sides is neutral by mutual consent. It

is courting death to walk upon it. Block-houses dot it at frequent intervals, containing small garrisons of Montenegrin and Turkish soldiers.

As we drove past the first Montenegrin block-house, we were reminded of a ride which we once took to it, while our knowledge of the border dangers was nil. On that occasion we had cantered, innocently, straight towards it, and were amused to see its little garrison promptly turn out. A man came running towards us motioning us to halt. This unmistakable request we suddenly obeyed, for the men behind had covered us with their rifles.

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Explanations followed, and the rest of the men came up smiling; but they sent us back towards Podgorica at once, which was only half an hour's ride away—saying that a bullet from the overlooking hill would be no unusual thing.

To-day we left this block-house on our left, and, striking the Zem, we drove along it till we reached a solitary house. A few hundred yards further down was a Turkish fort, with the banner of the Star and Crescent hanging lazily at the mast.

This house was the home of our friend, quite a young man of sixteen, but married and a proud father. He could well have been mistaken for twenty-five.

He was working in his field as we drew near, and hurried to meet us. First of all we went to the Zem, which fifty yards away would be unnoticed, as it lies between two deep banks, which break off suddenly and without any indication. This historical little river looked very peaceful as it flowed through deep basins, hollowed out of the rocky bed, and splashed over great boulders. How often has it been crossed by bands of men intent on bloodshed and murder, who often recrossed, flying and hunted fugitives! What quantities of blood have dyed those clear and crystal pools! What awful doings of death have they reflected!

The Turkish soldiers opposite turned out, and viewed our movements inquisitively. Our Albanian friend hinted that a too lengthy inspection might be misunderstood, so we withdrew.

The house was a curiosity. One-storied, and solidly built of stone; it had no windows, but suggestive loopholes. The ground floor was empty. We looked inside for the staircase, but in vain, and this was scarcely odd, because there was none. The family lives above, and the only means of entry to their dwelling is by a ladder. This is drawn up after the last man, for the night.

As we clambered up the ladder and crawled through the narrow doorway, the young mother (of fifteen) kissed our hands.

An aged lady, evidently the great-grandmother of one of the young couple—at least, to judge by her decrepit appearance, she might well have been that (in reality she was the boy's mother)—sat spinning in a corner. A weeping and noisy infant lay strapped immovably in a wooden cradle with no rockers, which a young maiden attempted to soothe by covering it with a thick cloth and rocking it vigorously.

That Montenegrins survive the ordeal of infancy is a proof of their iron constitutions. An ordinary healthy English baby would be suffocated in five minutes under that hermetic pall, or, escaping this fate, would die of concussion of the brain from violent jarring to and fro, which we have inadvertently termed "rocking."

A wood fire smouldered in one corner of the room, and the embers were blown into flames as the little can of water was placed in them to boil. As the water boils, several spoonfuls of coffee are put in—of the *good* coffee, only used for distinguished visitors—-and the whole allowed to boil up three or four times. Then cups are produced, sugar added, and the thick mixture poured out. This beverage is drunk when it is cool enough, and when the grounds have sunk in a thick sediment at the bottom of the cup.

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[Illustration: A REALISTIC PERFORMANCE]

[Illustration: AN ALBANIAN HOME ON THE CRNA ZEMLJA]

The room, our treatment, and the coffee-brewing are typical of many such visits that we paid in Montenegro.

Afterwards spirits were produced, tobacco tins exchanged, and arms—rifles, revolvers, and handjars—inspected and criticised. Any relics or curiosities are produced, and everyone becomes very friendly.

Before we left, an old man (some relation of our host) came up as we were examining a fine handjar, that heavy and hiltless sword which forms part of both the Albanian and Montenegrin fighting kit, though they are no longer universally carried in times of peace. The handy revolver has replaced the former beltful of pistols and yataghan. But in border fighting the handjar is always taken, and, when time permits, the victim is still decapitated by a single blow of that murderous weapon.

The old man—a villainous-looking rascal, with shaven head and scalping lock—-favoured us with a graphic mimicry of a fight, showing the methods in his day. He took the handjar between his teeth and a musket in his hands, yelling and scowling fearfully; then, the last cartridge fired or the moment for hand-to-hand combat arrived, the rifle was thrown away, and brandishing the handjar in the air, he darted towards us. It was a most realistic performance, and made us feel thankful that it was only play.

Suddenly the old man stopped his wild yelling and burst out laughing. He laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

We glanced behind us at the loophole door, and there, with a horrified look, peered our driver, revolver in hand.

He thought that we were being murdered. He was a foreigner and new to Podgorica, but more of him anon.

Then we took our leave and drove on to another block-house, and visited the commandant. After that we returned to Podgorica, and that afternoon, affectionate leave-takings over, we departed for Cetinje, en route for Cattaro.

That drive, which should have taken about seven hours, was a memorable one, and a fitting conclusion to our visit.

We wired to the hotel in Cetinje in the morning, ordering supper to be ready for eight o’clock. Then we had hoped to leave at one p.m. At two we again wired from Podgorica for supper to be delayed till ten.

A hundred yards from the town we stopped, and the driver mended some harness with a piece of wire. A mile further on something else broke. If nothing gave way, a horse kicked a leg over a trace, necessitating its partial unharnessing. Each time the driver (he of the morning's drive and a native of Hercegovina) descended, swearing softly between clenched teeth, in caressing tones, and his face set in a forced smile. If we had not understood what he said, he might have been addressing endearing remarks to his horse, or holding serious converse with a friend.

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It became very monotonous after a few hours—should we go for three hundred yards without a stop of five or ten minutes, it was a matter for comment. We began to feel alarmed, fearing worse things.

Rijeka we reached at eight p.m. instead of five, and we sent another wire, stating our arrival to be uncertain, if not improbable.

We seriously contemplated staying the night, but an appointment next morning forced us to give up this idea.

After an hour's rest we proceeded. The same weary repetition was resumed, either the near side horse lashed out violently and remained hung over a trace, or the axle boom or something broke.

We dozed, and I awoke from a sudden jar to find the driver sound asleep, the horses wandering aimlessly along, a precipice of many hundred feet below us on one side. The road takes sharp turns every hundred yards, rendering it impossible to see far ahead, and traffic even at night is not uncommon. Drivers shout when nearing a corner, particularly on coming downhill, which they do at a great pace. I shuddered at the thought of a carriage dashing suddenly round a corner upon us as we painfully climbed, for our driver slept soundly. I even shouted in his ear, but in vain. Then I struck him, and with effect. Inured as we were already by the dangers of that drive, we slept no more.

I looked at my watch; it was one o'clock. In another hour the look-out hut of Bella Vista loomed up indistinctly, and we thought of that grand view of the Lake of Scutari and the mountain panorama to be seen from there.

We stopped all the way down into Cetinje, at intervals, and had a long wait actually in the town itself while the driver hunted up a friend and borrowed a spanner.

At three a.m. we arrived, and refused the offer of our driver to take us down to Cattaro next day. He assured us that everything would be in order by the afternoon. But we declined, even though he made us a cheap offer, below the ordinary price. We had no more confidence in him or his carriage, or his wonderful kicking horse—in fact, we gave quite a curt and rude refusal, when he pressed the matter.

Safe inside the old-fashioned hostelry of Reinwein, we thanked Providence for our safe arrival. We had been through a few dangerous experiences during our sojourn in the Land of the Black Mountain, but none worse than this.

The carriage was small, and we suffered agonies from cramp; every moment we expected to see it fall to pieces; one of the horses lashed out violently, narrowly missing the face of the driver, if only touched with the whip, every time hitching itself over a trace

and threatening to kick the decrepit structure behind it to bits; the devilish anger of the man, his lurid and comprehensive cursing in that soft voice, the danger of dashing over a precipice, constituted a journey which we fervently pray may never again fall to our lot.

CHAPTER XX

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We reconsider our opinion of Cetinje—A Montenegrin wake and its consequences—A hero's death—Montenegrin conversation—Needless appeals to the Deity—We visit the hospital.

We have said that there are not many stirring events happening in Cetinje. But this was due to the fact that we had only a very superficial knowledge of the town. To appreciate it fully, though, it is absolutely necessary to know the country and the people first. We had quite made up our minds to go down to Cattaro the day following the memorable drive from Podgorica, but a mutual acquaintance, a Montenegrin of high standing, met us as we strolled aimlessly down the main street that morning. When he heard that we were leaving in a few hours, he became quite excited. Had we really seen everything, in Cetinje too?

"Yes," said we. "We have visited the monastery, watched the soldiers drilling, chatted with the criminals, and know every burgher of the town, at least by sight."

"First you must see the hospital and then you must attend a trial in the Supreme Court of Appeal," said our seducer. "And as for vendettas," he added with pride, "we too have our little quarrels. On the spot you are standing a man was shot five years ago, and in the act of dying he killed his assailant."

"Tell us the story," we broke in eagerly. Montenegro is demoralising in this respect. One becomes so used to bloodthirsty anecdotes that one wonders how other countries exist without the excitement of the vendetta. Then the intercourse with noted murderers and assassins makes a mere ordinary man whose hands are not stained with the blood of his fellow-beings seem dull and tame. Our eagerness pleased our friend and we adjourned to the cafe opposite.

About five years ago a near relation of the Prince died, and was taken to the home of Petrovic in Njegusi. To do honour to the dead man, the men of Cetinje and the men of Bajice—a village at the further end of the valley—accompanied the corpse as a guard of honour.

Now a corpse is waked in true Irish style in this country, and by the time the escort had returned to the valley of Cetinje and halted at Bajice for a parting glass, the condition of the mourners resembled the close of a Bank Holiday in London. The too liberal indulgence in raki or spirits does not always provoke that mellowness which follows a good dinner and a glass of port. On the contrary, you become argumentative and convinced of the truth of your side of the question, and you do not hesitate to tell the other man that he is more or less of a fool. So it came to pass in Bajice that those of Cetinje argued that they were the better men, a statement which did not conduce to good fellowship—in fact, a Voivoda who was present, a native of Bajice, had to interfere to prevent the only true solution of the question in point. He was an aged man, and the men of Cetinje proceeded home without proving their statement. One man, however,

stayed behind to continue the argument, and this naturally enraged the Voivoda. He ordered him to be beaten. Nothing loath, the worthy villagers fell upon him, and belaboured him with such fervour that he soon fell insensible to the ground. Before he lost consciousness, he was heard to utter a threat to the effect that his assailants would be sorry for it.

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Then he was carried to the hospital in Cetinje and lay six weeks recovering.

When he was well again, his thoughts were occupied with revenge, and in this scheme he was greatly assisted by his relations.

“Thou wilt be killed, of course,” they said, “but thine and our honour must be avenged. Who are the men of Bajice to beat one of us and go unpunished?”

He was of the same opinion, and cast about for a suitable victim. Now the son of the aged Voivoda who had ordered the assault lived in Cetinje. He was the captain of the Royal Body Guard, the hero of many a fight with the Turks, and famed throughout the land. We knew his son, who stands about six feet four inches, and he is said to have been small compared to what his father was.

“He shall be the victim,” said the man of Cetinje, and his relations applauded the choice.

One morning early the captain emerged from a shop, and from a distance of a few feet, the avenger of his honour fired at him from behind, hitting him in the neck. The captain fell forward on his face, saying, “Who has shot me?” and turning saw the assassin running up the street. With his last strength he drew his revolver, and resting his elbow on the ground, he fired once; the man reeled but continued his headlong flight: again the wounded officer fired, and as he sank forward dying, he had the satisfaction of seeing the fugitive throw up his hands and fall dead, shot through the heart. The last shot was fired at a distance of fifty yards.

“As you can imagine,” concluded our informant, “the news of this affray nearly caused a pitched battle between Bajice and Cetinje, which was only prevented by the energetic action of the Prince. He called the two clans together before his palace and with marvellous judgment picked out the ring-leaders and imprisoned them, and the rest were sent home with such a warning of what would come if he heard any more about it, that all interest was lost in the dispute. Men do not like to face our Prince when he is angered, and his constant presence in Cetinje is a great drawback to the vendetta. Now I must leave you, and to-morrow you shall visit the hospital.”

We strolled to the market-place, which was full of peasants and their produce. It is not nearly such a scene of life as is met with elsewhere. The Albanian element is almost totally absent, and that alone takes fifty per cent. of the wildness off. Neither are rifles brought to Cetinje, so that it presents a far more peaceable aspect. Still it is crowded, the guslars do a literally roaring trade, and there are always a sprinkling of men from the Vasovic and other outlying clans to liven up the scene.

Here old friends and comrades in arms meet, called to the capital as witnesses, or principals, in a law case, or to draw their salaries as small officials of their districts. The conversation on these occasions is always the same, and if heard often, becomes

monotonous. The unvarying formula of greeting is quaint and terse, but it loses much of its impressive character by translation. One word in explanation. The Montenegrins cannot utter the simplest remark without invoking the Almighty in some form or another. The use of the word “Bog,” or “God,” is incessant.

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Picture an aged man, whose grey stubble fringes a weather-beaten and furrowed face with a grizzled moustache. He is smoking a grimy tchibouque in a contemplative fashion, as he stands on the outskirts of the chattering throng. To him approaches a second stalwart, lean man about the same age and appearance. He is also smoking a long tchibouque; it is a custom which the elder inhabitants have adopted from the Turks.

“May God protect thee,” says the new-comer gravely, as though he had never given vent to such a momentous utterance before.

“May God give thee good fortune,” answers the other, with equal solemnity; and removing their pipes, they clasp hands and fervently kiss each other. Then the smoking is resumed, and between the puffs the following conversation ensues.

“How art thou?” says the new-comer, gazing with affection at his old comrade.

“Well, thank God,” replies the other.

“Thank God.”

“And how art thou?”

“Well, thank God.”

“Thank God.”

Now it is the new-comer’s turn for the Montenegrin catechism.

The questions already asked and answered are only the prelude, so to speak, before they settle down to serious business. “Kako ste?” ("How art thou?”) is simply as meaningless as “How do you do”; in fact, a mere matter of form.

“Art thou well?” says the questioner, referring to the other’s state of health, who replies —

“I am well, by God, thank God.”

“Thank God,” says the questioner, breathing more freely, and continuing.

“How is thy wife?” “How are thy children?” “Thy grandchildren?” “Thy brother?” “Thy sister?” To all of which a deep-toned “Well, thank God,” is given.

Having satisfied himself that the whole family is in reasonable health, and quite certain that he has omitted no important relation, the catechiser proceeds to inquire as to the other’s worldly possessions.

“How are thy crops?”

“God will give me a good harvest.”

“How are thy horses?” “Thy sheep?” “Thy goats?” “Thy cows?” “Thy pigs?” “Thy bees?”

It must be clearly understood, to appreciate the humour of the scene, that the formula has been shortened to avoid vain repetition. Every question is asked in full, and answered with a pious “Dobro, hfala Bogu” ("Well, thank God"). Not a word is omitted. The concluding question is put, after a few moments’ thought that really no item has been left out, and this covers any lapse of memory.

“And, in short, How art thou?”

“Dobro, hfala Bogu” ("Well, thank God").

“Hfala Bogu” ("Thank God").

Now it is the other’s turn, and precisely the same questions are asked, varied perhaps with an inquiry as to the state of health of the district “standard bearer” or “mayor.” Then a few minutes’ general conversation are indulged in as to the direct cause of the other’s visit to Cetinje, and each satisfied that he has gained every particle of information, they clasp hands, kiss, and part with a measured “S’Bogom,” signifying that they commend each other to the Almighty’s keeping.

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The simplest and most inoffensive query is answered thus:—

“Hast thou any milk?” says the thirsty wayfarer, pausing at a hut.

“I have none, by God,” and the stranger proceeds wearily on his way.

Our visit to the hospital was decidedly interesting. The senior doctor of Montenegro was an ex-Austrian military surgeon. He was very pressing in his invitation, so one day we wended our steps thither at eleven o’clock. We were met by a smart-looking nurse, who told us that the doctor was at present engaged in an operation, and would be with us shortly. He soon appeared, and, apologising for the simplicity of the building, started taking us round. First he led us into the accident-room, where the injured are first treated. There were the usual operating-tables and cases of instruments. “We treat wounds that are suppurating here,” he said pleasantly. “Our real operating-room is in the other house, and is much better fitted up. This being the only hospital in the country I have all the operations to perform, generally one a day.”

Then we went into the Roentgen room. The X rays, the doctor informed us, was very useful in locating bullets. In the men’s ward a young man was pointed out to us who had been shot twice during a kolo dance in the arm and leg.

“The Montenegrins,” said the doctor, “are very careless when they fire their revolvers during a dance, and I get a good many patients that way.” Afterwards we visited some other wards, and we were finally taken to the other operating-room, or theatre. But it was only a reproduction of the other on a large scale. “The Prince is very generous,” said the doctor, “and gives me a free hand. We have every modern appliance, and I have trained my assistants to such an extent that I can absolutely rely on them. The hospital costs a lot of money, for we only charge a krone (about a franc) a day, and then they petition that they cannot pay.”

After inscribing our names in a book we went back to our midday meal.

The hospital, from a medical and surgical standpoint, is extremely up to date, and at its head is a doctor who may be counted as one of the finest operators in Europe; at his own request his name has not been mentioned. It is another instance of Prince Nicolas’ benevolence to his people, another of the progressive movements which he is ever introducing into the country. Every district has a doctor, all of whom are under the head doctor at Cetinje, who directs all treatment in the case of an epidemic. Serious cases are sent to Cetinje and treated there, but these are largely surgical. The fame of the doctor at Cetinje has reached the furthermost village; men who have suffered for years now troop joyfully to the capital, and the number of operations increases yearly.

May the hospital and its capable chief flourish and continue to bring the blessings of science to the worthy sons of the Black Mountain!

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CHAPTER XXI

The Law Court in Cetinje—The Prince as patriarch—A typical lawsuit—Pleasant hours with murderers—Our hostel—A Babel of tongues—Our sojourn draws to a close—The farewell cup of coffee and apostrophe.

The Law Court in Cetinje is distinctly quaint. All civil cases are conducted in public, and the method of procedure is simplicity itself.[9] Firstly there are no lawyers and no costs, the rival parties conducting their case in person—that is to say, they are present, and are examined and cross-examined by the judge and his six assistants. All the preliminaries have been committed to writing and are read out by the clerk of the court, the only other official present. In a small inclosure sit the plaintiff and defendant and their witnesses; behind a railing, stand and sit the audience of admiring friends and relations.

[Footnote 9: This is all altered now since the end of 1902, when a new code and system was introduced, more up to date.]

The room is long and low. At the further end on a raised dais sits the judge, behind whom is a lifesize reproduction of the Prince's photograph. At a horseshoe-shaped table sit the other judges, three on each side, and in the middle is another table holding the Bible, crucifix, and two candles. The candles are lit when a witness takes the oath.

In the intervening space is a large and comfortable easy-chair, or perhaps it would be more correct and dignified to call it a throne. It is occupied by Prince Nicolas whenever he comes in, as he often does, for an hour or so, for he takes a keen interest in the law cases of his subjects. When he is present the proceedings are in no way altered, but the Prince himself puts now and then a pertinent question to the witnesses. Furthermore, it is here that the Prince every Saturday, when he is in residence in Cetinje, holds public audience and receives petitions and complaints from his lowliest subjects. Every petition must be committed to writing, and in the appointed order each man or woman steps forward while the document is read aloud by the clerk. The Prince puts a question or two to the petitioner and then gives his answer to the request, which is duly noted, and the next person called.

It is all so simple and quick that it is hard to realise the importance of this commendable institution. In the olden days the Prince dispensed justice and favours, seated under the shade of an enormous tree, which has now, however, been destroyed. But in the height of summer, a shady spot in the open air is still found.

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We listened to one case, that of a woman who had amassed a large sum of money—for Montenegro—by fetching water from a distance at so much a gallon. Cetinje is almost waterless in summer, and water-carriers can earn small fortunes, particularly if equipped with a donkey or two, as was this woman. Having saved a few hundred guldens, she proceeded to lend it to needy friends—people are foolish in this respect, even in Montenegro. It would have been all right if she had not neglected the simple precaution of insisting on an I.O.U. for each loan. Her money gone, she not unnaturally asked that some of it should be returned, for she had fallen on evil days. But all knowledge of such loans was denied by the ungrateful borrowers.

It was a knotty point to decide. Should the judges believe the woman's word, or the emphatic denials of the debtors that they had ever received a kreutzer? The seven looked hopelessly at each other, and then wisely retired to the seclusion of a private room, awaiting divine inspiration.

As of yore, the little prison, or rather house of detention, had a great attraction for us. Many afternoons we wended our way thither to while away an hour in the genial company of the prisoners and their warders. The handsome young director of prisons usually accompanied us, ostensibly but to bear us company, though doubtless he was acting on higher orders, and had instructions to see that our eccentricities did not go too far.

We organised sports on some occasions, chiefly consisting of putting the weight, *i.e.* a large stone, but they *would* swindle and invariably overstepped the limit line, declaring that they hadn't afterwards.

But it was their stories that we loved to listen to. They were mostly harmless quarrellers, for we shunned the debased thieving criminal; a man who could steal was vigorously excluded from our circle. There was one exception, however, and he was a Hungarian, a deserter from his regiment. That in itself is not a punishable crime, but he had eased the regimental cash-box of a thousand kronen at the time of his departure, and was awaiting the result of investigations. He maintained that the money was his, and was quite indignant when it was hinted that he must have stolen it; but unluckily he destroyed any belief in his honesty by invariably contradicting himself as to how he came by it. But he was such a good-natured, pleasant-spoken man that we let him sit by our side and prevaricate, till we bade him cease from further blackening his soul.

We gleaned a lot more information from the young director of the prison, and amongst it the method of recapturing escaped prisoners. In the central prison at Podgorica, if a prisoner escapes, the rest of the criminals are sent out to catch him. Very often they find him, and never has a prisoner abused this privilege, all punctually returning by a given date.

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We stayed at Reinwein's inn, an unpretentious building, both as regards the exterior and interior, but as Reinwein himself is a Viennese, and has been for twelve years in the service of the Prince, acting often as cook, it is quite safe to say that at his house the best cooking in the whole of Montenegro is to be found. Coming into the country this would not be so noticeable, but after months in other Montenegrin towns the cooking is most appreciable. We spent very happy evenings in his bare little dining-room, with a decidedly cosmopolitan gathering. The most noticeable feature was the number of languages in use. Even Dalmatia, Bosnia, and the Hercegovina, where a three-languaged man is the rule, paled into insignificance. There was a Turkish official staying at Reinwein's, transacting business for his Government, and every evening men came to see him; that man was to be heard—he was a Neapolitan by birth—conversing fluently in Turkish, Albanian, Serb, Greek, Italian, and French, alternately. One evening I was trying to follow the conversation, which began in Italian, then he wandered off into other tongues, explaining, evidently, a letter written in Turkish. I got interested and went over to his table, and, afterwards, he told me which languages he had been using. Besides this little list, Reinwein spoke Russian with another man, German largely with us, and P. and I passed remarks to each other in English, which was the only unknown language. One evening two Hungarian tourists arrived, and then we fled from that Babel, fearing for our reason.

An affable old Turk, seedy in appearance, but extremely entertaining, owned to six languages, not counting others of which he had only a smattering. Serb he didn't count as he said he could only talk on easy subjects in that tongue. It is very humiliating, that sort of thing, it is liable to lower the opinion of one's own intelligence. We kept late hours, too, at Reinwein's, we couldn't help it.

But all good things must come to an end, and at last the day of our departure arrived. Cetinje itself was quite a different place to us than when we knew it formerly. Representative of the land in a certain sense it rightly is, but then a fairly full knowledge of the country must be acquired first to understand in what respects it represents the life and customs of the people beyond. To the stranger who extends his visit for only a week, it is sure to give manifold false impressions, for though Montenegro is quiet and peaceable enough, the appearance of Cetinje is rather too assuring. For here there is little trace of vendetta and quarrelling, which, however, under the powerful hand of the present Prince Nicolas, are surely dying out through all the land. When the fact is taken into consideration that the Montenegro of forty years ago was a rough and dangerous country, inhabited by a people who knew nothing of the outside world, and lived simply for themselves in their own

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land, it will be seen what miraculous progress has been made in the path of civilisation during the present reign. Peace and order have been established to a wonderful degree, and the State reorganised and set on a surer basis. With a powerful hand and not too much external help the Prince has carried through his reforms, and, like David in his final exhortation to Solomon, leaves the way ready for still greater progress to be made in the future. And the comparison holds good in more respects than one.

We drank our last little cup of coffee, oddly enough, in the historical monastery of Ivan Beg in the company of the Vladika, to whom we were paying our farewell respects, and half an hour later were whirling down to Bajice under the shadow of the mighty Lovcen.

As the grand Bocche di Cattaro again burst on our view and the first black and yellow sign-post of Austria was passed, we turned again for a last look at those seemingly forbidding and inhospitable mountains; but only forbidding and inhospitable to the enemy of the brave little race beyond. To the stranger, fresh from the comforts and improvements of civilisation, it is a revelation of how men live, knowing nothing of the luxuries of the outer world, and keep themselves untarnished in honour; honest and God-fearing where a man is judged by his deeds and not by his words. Where men do not steal or lie, and where the humble peasant looks his Prince in the face and says—

“Lord, I am a man like thyself.”

They have their faults and failings, many of their customs seem barbaric to our eyes: but may they long be preserved from the evils of civilisation!

Later, as the ship ploughed her way through the waves, and the mountains of Crnagora became ever more and more faint and indistinct, we thought of Tennyson’s words:—

“They rose to where their sov’ran eagle sails,
They kept their faith, their freedom, on the height,
Chaste, frugal, savage, armed by day and night
Against the Turk; whose inroad nowhere scales
Their headlong passes, but his footstep fails,
And red with blood the Crescent reels from fight
Before their dauntless hundreds in prone flight
By thousands down the crags and through the vales.

* * * * *

O smallest among peoples! rough rock-throne
Of Freedom! warriors beating back the swarm
Of Turkish Islam for five hundred years,

Great Crnagora! never since thine own
Black ridges drew the cloud and broke the storm
Has breathed a race of mightier mountaineers.”

THE END

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